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Faithful Yours
Richard Jaffrey

THE EULOGY OF RICHARD JEFFERIES

BY

WALTER BESANT

'I hearing got, who had but ears,
And sight, who had but eyes before;
I moments live, who lived but years,
And truth discern, who knew but learning's lore.'

THOREAU.

WITH A PORTRAIT

NEW YORK
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TO THE

WIDOW AND THE TWO CHILDREN

OF

RICHARD JEFFERIES

I DEDICATE THIS MEMORIAL, IN THE EARNEST HOPE

THAT IT MAY NOT BE FOUND WHOLLY

UNWORTHY OF ITS SUBJECT.

PREFACE.

In the body of this work I have sufficiently explained the reasons why I was entrusted with the task of writing this memoir of Richard Jefferies. I have only here to express my thanks, first to the publishers, who have given permission to quote from books by Jefferies issued by them, namely: Messrs. Cassell and Co., Messrs. Chapman and Hall, Messrs. Longman and Co., Messrs. Sampson Low and Co., Messrs. Smith and Elder, and Messrs. Tinsley Brothers, and next, to all those who have entrusted me with letters written by Jefferies, and have given permission to use them. These are: Mrs. Harrild, of Sydenham,

Mr. Charles Longman, Mr. J. W. North, and Mr. C. P. Scott. I have also been provided with the note-books filled with Jefferies' notes made in the fields. These have enabled me to understand, and, I hope, to convey to others some understanding of, the writer's methods. I call this book the "Eulogy" of Richard Jefferies, because, in very truth, I can find nothing but admiration, pure and unalloyed, for that later work of his, on which will rest his fame and his abiding memory.

W. B.

United University Club,
September, 1888.

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THE

EULOGY

OF

RICHARD JEFFERIES.

CHAPTER I.

COATE FARM.

"Go," said the Voice which dismisses the soul on its way to inhabit an earthly frame. "Go; thy lot shall be to speak of trees, from the cedar even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall; and of beasts also, and of fowls, and of fishes. All thy ways shall be ordered for thee, so that thou shalt learn to speak of these things as no man ever spoke before. Thou shalt rise into great honour among men. Many shall love to hear thy

voice above all the voices of those who speak. This is a great gift. Thou shalt also enjoy the tender love of wife and children. Yet the things which men most desire—riches, rank, independence, ease, health, and long life—these are denied to thee. Thou shalt be always poor; thou shalt live in humble places; the goad of necessity shall continually prick thee to work when thou wouldst meditate; to write when thou wouldst walk forth to observe. Thou shalt never be able to sit down to rest; thou shalt be afflicted with grievous plaguy diseases; and thou shalt die when little more than half the allotted life of man is past. Go, therefore. Be happy with what is given, and lament not over what is denied."

Richard Jefferies—christened John Richard, but he was always called by his second name—was born on November 6, 1848, at the farm-house of Coate—you may pronounce it, if you please, in Wiltshire fashion—Caute. The house stands on the road from Swindon to Marlborough, about two miles and a half from the

former place. It has now lost its old picturesqueness, because the great heavy thatch which formerly served for roof has been removed and replaced by slates. I know not whether any gain in comfort has been achieved by this change, but the effect to outward view has been to reduce what was once a beautiful old house to meanness.

It consists of two rooms on the ground-floor, four on the first floor, and two large garrets in the roof, one of which, as we shall see, has memorable associations. The keeping-room of the family is remarkable for its large square window, built out so as to afford a delightful retreat for reading or working in the summer, or whenever it is not too cold to sit away from the fireplace. The other room, called, I believe, the best parlour, is larger, but it lacks the square window. In the days when the Jefferies family lived here it seems to have been used as a kind of store-room or lumber-room. At the back of the house is a kitchen belonging to a much older house; it is a low room built solidly of stone with timber rafters.

Beside the kitchen is a large modern room, which was used in Richard's childhood as a chapel of ease, in which service was read every Sunday for the hamlet of Coate.

Between the house and the road is a small flower-garden ; at the side of the house is a vegetable-garden, with two or three fruit-trees, and beyond this an orchard. On the other side of the house are the farm buildings. There seems to be little traffic up and down the road, and the hamlet consists of nothing more than half a dozen labourers' cottages.

"I remember," writes one who knew him in boyhood, "every little detail of the house and grounds, even to the delicious scent of the musk underneath the old bay window"—it still springs up afresh every summer between the cobble stones—"the 'grind-stone' apple, the splendid egg-plum which drooped over the roof, the little Siberian crabs, the damsons —I could plant each spot with its own particular tree—the drooping willow, the swing, the quaint little arbour, the fuchsia-bushes, the hedge walks, the little arched gate leading into the road, the delightful scent under the

limes, the little bench by the ha-ha looking towards Swindon and the setting sun. I am actually crying over these delicious memories of my childhood; if ever I loved a spot of this earth, it was Coate House. The scent of the sweet-briar takes me there in a moment; the walnut-trees you recollect, and the old wooden pump, where the villagers came for water; the hazel copse that my uncle planted; the gateway that led to the reservoir; the sitting-room, with its delightful square window; the porch, where the swallows used to build year after year; and the kitchen, with its wide hearth and dark window."

In "Amaryllis at the Fair" the scene is laid at Coate Farm. But, indeed, as we shall see, Coate was never absent from Jefferies' mind for long.

Coate is not, I believe, a large farm. It had, however, been in the possession of the family for many generations. Once—twice—it passed out of their hands, and was afterwards recovered. It was finally lost about twelve years ago. To belong to an old English yeoman stock is, perhaps, good enough

ancestry for anyone, though not, certainly, "showy." Richard Jefferies was a veritable son of the soil: not descended from those who have nothing to show but long centuries of servitude, but with a long line behind him of independent farmers occupying their own land. Field and forest lore were therefore his by right of inheritance.

As for the country round about Coate, I suppose there is no district in the world that has been more minutely examined, explored, and described. Jefferies knew every inch of ground, every tree, every hedge. The land which lies in a circle of ten miles' radius, the centre of which is Coate Farm-house, belongs to the writings of Jefferies. He lived elsewhere, but mostly he wrote of Coate. The "Gamekeeper at Home," the "Amateur Poacher," "Wild Life in a Southern County," "Round about a Great Estate," "Hodge and his Masters," are all written of this small bit of Wiltshire. Nay, in "Wood Magic," in "Amaryllis at the Fair," in "Green Ferne Farm," and in "Bevis," we are still either at Coate Farm itself or on the hills around.

It is a country of downs. Two of them, within sight of the farmhouse, are covered with the grassy mounds and trenches of ancient forts or "castles." There are plantations here and there, and coppices, but the general aspect of the country is treeless; it is also a dry country. In winter there are watercourses which in summer are dry; yet it is not without brooks. Jefferies shows ("Wild Life in a Southern County," p. 29) that in ancient and prehistoric time the whole country must have been covered with forests, of which the most important survival is what is now called Ashbourne Chase. For one who loved solitude and wanderings among the hills, there could be hardly any part of England more delightful. Within a reasonable walk from Coate are Barbury Hill, Liddington Hill, and Ashbourne Chase; there are downs extending as far as Marlborough, over which a man may walk all day long and meet no one. It is a country, moreover, full of ancient monuments; besides the strongholds of Liddington and Barbury, there are everywhere tumuli, barrows, cromlechs, and stone circles. Way-

land Smith's Forge is within a walk to the east; another walk, somewhat longer, takes you to Avebury, to Wan's Dyke, to the Grey Wethers of Marlborough, or the ancient forest of Savernake. There are ancient memories or whispers of old wars and prehistoric battles about this country. At Barbury the Britons made a final stand against the Saxons, and were defeated with great slaughter. Wanborough, now a village, was then an important centre where four Roman roads met, so that the chieftain or king who had his seat at Wanborough could communicate rapidly, and call up forces from Sarum, Silchester, Winchester, and the Chilterns. All these things speak nothing to a boy who is careless and incurious. But Richard Jefferies was a boy curious and inquiring. He had, besides, friends who directed his attention to the meaning of the ancient monuments within his reach, and taught him something of the dim and shadowy history of the people who built them. He loved to talk and think of them; in after-years he wrote a book—"After London"—which was inspired by these early

meditations upon prehistoric Britain. He himself discovered—it is an archæological find of very considerable importance—how the garrisons of these hill-top forts provided themselves with water. And as for his special study of creatures and their ways, the wildness of the country is highly favourable, both to their preservation and to opportunities for study. Perhaps no other part of England was better for the development of his genius than the Wiltshire Downs. Do you want to catch the feeling of the air upon these downs? Remember the words which begin "Wild Life in a Southern County."

"The most commanding down is crowned with the grassy mould and trenches of an ancient earthwork, from whence there is a noble view of hill and plain. The inner slope of the green fosse is inclined at an angle pleasant to recline on, with the head just below the edge, in the summer sunshine. A faint sound as of a sea heard in a dream—a sibilant 'sish, sish'—passes along outside, dying away and coming again as a fresh wave of the wind

rushes through the bennets and the dry grass. There is the happy hum of bees—who love the hills—as they speed by laden with their golden harvest, a drowsy warmth, and the delicious odour of wild thyme. Behind the fosse sinks, and the rampart rises high and steep—two butterflies are wheeling in uncertain flight over the summit. It is only necessary to raise the head a little way, and the cool breeze refreshes the cheek—cool at this height while the plains beneath glow under the heat."

All day long the trains from Devon, Cornwall, Somerset and South Wales, from Exeter, Bristol, Bath, Gloucester, and Oxford, run into Swindon and stop there for ten minutes—every one of them—while the passengers get out and crowd into the refreshment rooms.

Swindon to all these travellers is nothing at all but a refreshment-room. It has no other association—nobody takes a ticket to Swindon any more than to Crewe—it is the station where people have ten minutes allowed for eating. As for any village, or town, of Swindon, nobody has ever inquired whether there

be such a place. Swindon is a luncheon-bar; that is all. There is, however, more than a refreshment-room at Swindon. First, there has grown up around the station a new town of twenty thousand people, all employés of the Great Western Railway, all engaged upon the works of the company. This is not by any means a beautiful town, but it is not squalid; on the contrary, it is clean, and looks prosperous and contented, with fewer public-houses (but here one may be mistaken) than are generally found. It is an industrial city—a city of the employed—skilled artisans, skilled engineers, blacksmiths, foremen, and clerks. A mile south of this new town—but there are houses nearly all the way—the old Swindon stands upon a hill, occupying, most likely, the site of a British fortress, such as that of Liddington or Barbury. It is a market town of six or eight thousand people. Formerly there was a settlement of Dutch in the place connected with the wool trade. They have long since gone, but the houses which they built—picturesque old houses presenting two gables to the street—remained after them. Of these

nearly all are now pulled down, so that there is little but red brick to look upon. In fact, it would be difficult to find a town more devoid of beauty. They have pulled down the old church, except the chancel: there was once an old mill—Jefferies' grandfather was the tenant. That is also pulled down, and there is a kind of square or *place* where there is the corn exchange: I think that there is nothing else to see.

On market-day, however, the town is full of crowd and bustle; at the Goddard Arms you can choose between a hot dinner upstairs and a cold lunch downstairs, and you will find both rooms filled with men who know each other and are interested in lambing and other bucolic matters. The streets are filled with drivers, sheep, and cattle; there is a horse market; in the corn market the farmers, slow of speech, carry their sample-bags in their hands; the carter, whip in hand, stands about on the kerb-stone; but in spite of the commotion no one is in a hurry. It is the crowd alone which gives the feeling of busy life.

Looking from Swindon Hill, south and east

and west, there stretches away the great expanse of downs which nobody ever seems to visit; the treasure-land of monuments built by a people passed away—not our ancestors at all. This is the country over which the feet of Richard Jefferies loved to roam, never weary of their wandering. On the slopes of these green hills he has measured the ramparts of the ancient fortress; lying on the turf, he has watched the hawk in the air; among these fields he has sat for hours motionless and patient, until the creatures thought him a statue and played their pranks before him without fear. In these hedges he has peered and searched and watched; in these woods and in these fields and on these hillsides he has seen in a single evening's walk more things of wonder and beauty than one of us poor purblind city creatures can discern in the whole of the six weeks which we yearly give up to Nature and to fresh air. This corner of England must be renamed. As Yorkshire hath its Craven, its Cleveland, its Richmond, and its Holderness, so Wiltshire shall have its Jefferies-land, lying in an irregular oval on

whose circumference stand Swindon, Barbury, Liddington, Ashbourne Chase and Wanborough.

Richard Jefferies was the second of five children, three sons and two daughters. The eldest child, a daughter, was killed by a runaway horse at the age of five. The Swindon people, who are reported to be indifferent to the works of their native author, remember his family very well. They seem to have possessed qualities or eccentricities which cause them to be remembered. His grandfather, for instance, who is without doubt the model for old Iden in "Amaryllis," was at the same time a miller and a confectioner. The mill stood near the west end of the old church; both mill and church are now pulled down. It was worked for the tenant by his brother, a man still more eccentric than the miller. The family seems to have inherited, from father to son, a disposition of reserve, a love of solitude, and a habit of thinking for themselves. No gregarious man, no man who loved to sit among his fellows, could possibly have written even the shortest of Jefferies' papers.

The household at Coate has been partly—but only partly—described in "Amaryllis at the Fair." It consisted of his parents, himself, his next brother, a year younger than himself, and a brother and sister much younger. Farmer Iden, in "Amaryllis," is, in many characteristics, a portrait of his father. Truly, it is not a portrait to shame any man; and though the lines are strongly drawn, one hopes that the original, who is still living, was not offended at a picture so striking and so original. Jefferies has drawn for us the figure of a man full of wisdom and thought, who speaks now in broad Wiltshire and now in clear, good English; one who meditates aloud; one who roams about his fields watching and remembering; one who brings to the planting of potatoes as much thought and care as if he were writing an immortal poem; yet an unpractical and unsuccessful man, who goes steadily and surely down-hill while those who have not a tenth part of his wisdom and ability climb upwards. A novelist, however, draws his portraits as best suits his purpose; he arranges the lights to fall on this feature

or on that; he conceals some things and exaggerates others, so that even with the picture of Farmer Iden before us, it would be rash to conclude that we know the elder Jefferies. Some of the pictures, however, must be surely drawn from the life. For instance, that of the farmer planting his potatoes:

"Under the wall was a large patch recently dug, beside the patch a grass path, and on the path a wheelbarrow. A man was busy putting in potatoes; he wore the raggedest coat ever seen on a respectable back. As the wind lifted the tails it was apparent that the lining was loose and only hung by threads, the cuffs were worn through, there was a hole beneath each arm, and on each shoulder the nap of the cloth was gone; the colour, which had once been gray, was now a mixture of several soils and numerous kinds of grit. The hat he had on was no better; it might have been made of some hard pasteboard, it was so bare.

"The way in which he was planting potatoes was wonderful; every potato was placed at exactly the right distance apart, and a hole

made for it in the general trench; before it was set it was looked at and turned over, and the thumb rubbed against it to be sure that it was sound, and when finally put in, a little mould was delicately adjusted round to keep it in its right position till the whole row was buried. He carried the potatoes in his coat pocket—those, that is, for the row—and took them out one by one; had he been planting his own children he could not have been more careful. The science, the skill, and the experience brought to this potato-planting you would hardly credit; for all this care was founded upon observation, and arose from very large abilities on the part of the planter, though directed to so humble a purpose at that moment."

This book also contains certain references to past family history which show that there had been changes and chances with losses and gains. They may be guessed from the following:

"'The daffodil was your great-uncle's favourite flower.'

"'Richard?' asked Amaryllis.

"'Richard,' repeated Iden. And Amaryllis,

noting how handsome her father's intellectual face looked, wandered in her mind from the flower as he talked, and marvelled how he could be so rough sometimes, and why he talked like the labourers, and wore a ragged coat—he who was so full of wisdom in his other moods, and spoke, and thought, and indeed acted as a perfect gentleman.

"'Richard's favourite flower,' he went on. 'He brought the daffodils down from Luckett's; every one in the garden came from there. He was always reading poetry, and writing, and sketching, and yet he was such a capital man of business; no one could understand that. He built the mill, and saved heaps of money; he bought back the old place at Luckett's, which belonged to us before Queen Elizabeth's days; indeed, he very nearly made up the fortunes Nicholas and the rest of them got rid of. He was, indeed, a man. And now it is all going again—faster than he made it.'"

Everybody knows the Dutch picture of the dinner at the farm—the description of the leg of mutton. Was ever leg of mutton thus glorified?

"That day they had a leg of mutton—a special occasion—a joint to be looked on reverently. Mr. Iden had walked into the town to choose it himself some days previously, and brought it home on foot in a flag basket. The butcher would have sent it, and if not, there were men on the farm who could have fetched it, but it was much too important to be left to a second person. No one could do it right but Mr. Iden himself. There was a good deal of reason in this personal care of the meat, for it is a certain fact that unless you do look after such things yourself, and that persistently, too, you never get it first-rate. For this cause people in grand villas scarcely ever have anything worth eating on their tables. Their household expenses reach thousands yearly, and yet they rarely have anything eatable, and their dinner-tables can never show meat, vegetables, or fruit equal to Mr. Iden's. The meat was dark-brown, as mutton should be, for if it is the least bit white it is sure to be poor; the grain was short, and ate like bread and butter, firm, and yet almost crumbling to the touch; it was full

of juicy red gravy, and cut pleasantly, the knife went through it nicely; you can tell good meat directly you touch it with the knife. It was cooked to a turn, and had been done at a wood fire on a hearth; no oven taste, no taint of coal gas or carbon; the pure flame of wood had browned it. Such emanations as there may be from burning logs are odorous of the woodland, of the sunshine, of the fields and fresh air; the wood simply gives out as it burns the sweetness it has imbibed through its leaves from the atmosphere which floats above grass and flowers. Essences of this order, if they do penetrate the fibres of the meat, add to its flavour a delicate aroma. Grass-fed meat, cooked at a wood fire, for me."

After the dinner, the great strong man with the massive head, who can never make anything succeed, sits down to sleep alone beside the fire, his head leaning where for thirty years it had daily leaned, against the wainscot, so that there was now a round spot upon it, completely devoid of varnish.

"That panel was in effect a cross on which

a heart had been tortured for the third of a century, that is, for the space of time allotted to a generation.

"That mark upon the panel had still a further meaning; it represented the unhappiness, the misfortunes, the Nemesis of two hundred years. This family of Idens had endured already two hundred years of unhappiness and discordance for no original fault of theirs, simply because they had once been fortunate of old time, and therefore they had to work out that hour of sunshine to the utmost depths of shadow.

"The panel of the wainscot upon which that mark had been worn was in effect a cross upon which a human heart had been tortured —and thought can, indeed, torture—for a third of a century. For Iden had learned to know himself, and despaired."

Then the man falls asleep, and Amaryllis steals in on tiptoe to find a book. Then the wife, with a shawl round her shoulders, creeps outside the house and looks in at the window —angry with her unpractical husband.

"Slight sounds, faint rustlings, began to be audible among the cinders in the fender. The dry cinders were pushed about by something passing between them. After a while a brown mouse peered out at the end of the fender under Iden's chair, looked round a moment, and went back to the grate. In a minute he came again, and ventured somewhat farther across the width of the white hearthstone to the verge of the carpet. This advance was made step by step, but on reaching the carpet the mouse rushed home to cover in one run—like children at 'touch wood,' going out from a place of safety very cautiously, returning swiftly. The next time another mouse followed, and a third appeared at the other end of the fender. By degrees they got under the table, and helped themselves to the crumbs; one mounted a chair and reached the cloth, but soon descended, afraid to stay there. Five or six mice were now busy at their dinner.

"The sleeping man was as still and quiet as if carved.

"A mouse came to the foot, clad in a great rusty-hued iron-shod boot—the foot that

rested on the fender, for he had crossed his knees. His ragged and dingy trouser, full of March dust, and earth-stained by labour, was drawn up somewhat higher than the boot. It took the mouse several trials to reach the trouser, but he succeeded, and audaciously mounted to Iden's knee. Another quickly followed, and there the pair of them feasted on the crumbs of bread and cheese caught in the folds of his trousers.

"One great brown hand was in his pocket, close to them—a mighty hand, beside which they were pigmies indeed in the land of the giants. What would have been the value of their lives between a finger and thumb that could crack a ripe and strong-shelled walnut?

"The size—the mass—the weight of his hand alone was as a hill overshadowing them; his broad frame like the Alps; his head high above as a vast rock that overhung the valley.

"His thumb-nail—widened by labour with spade and axe—his thumb-nail would have covered either of the tiny creatures as his shield covered Ajax.

"Yet the little things fed in perfect confidence. He was so still, so *very* still—quiescent—they feared him no more than they did the wall; they could not hear his breathing.

"Had they been gifted with human intelligence, that very fact would have excited their suspicions. Why so very, *very* still? Strong men, wearied by work, do not sleep quietly; they breathe heavily. Even in firm sleep we move a little now and then, a limb trembles, a muscle quivers, or stretches itself.

"But Iden was so still it was evident he was really wide awake and restraining his breath, and exercising conscious command over his muscles, that this scene might proceed undisturbed.

"Now the strangeness of the thing was in this way: Iden set traps for mice in the cellar and the larder, and slew them there without mercy. He picked up the trap, swung it round, opening the door at the same instant, and the wretched captive was dashed to death upon the stone flags of the floor. So he hated them and persecuted them in one place, and fed them in another.

"From the merest thin slit, as it were, between his eyelids, Iden watched the mice feed and run about his knees till, having eaten every crumb, they descended his leg to the floor."

This portrait is not true in all its details. For instance, the elder Jefferies had small and shapely hands and feet—not the massive hands described in "Amaryllis."

Another slighter portrait of his father is found in "After London." It is that of the Baron :

"As he pointed to the tree above, the muscles, as the limb moved, displayed themselves in knots, at which the courtier himself could not refrain from glancing. Those mighty arms, had they clasped him about the waist, could have crushed his bending ribs. The heaviest blow that he could have struck upon that broad chest would have produced no more effect than a hollow sound ; it would not even have shaken that powerful frame.

"He felt the steel blue eyes, bright as the sky of midsummer, glance into his very mind.

The high forehead bare, for the Baron had his hat in his hand, mocked at him in its humility. The Baron bared his head in honour of the courtier's office and the Prince who had sent him. The beard, though streaked with white, spoke little of age; it rather indicated an abundant, a luxuriant vitality."

And I have before me a letter which contains the following passage concerning the elder Jefferies:

"The garden, the orchard, the hedges of the fields were always his chief delight; he had planted many a tree round and about his farm. Not a single bird that flew but he knew, and could tell its history; if you walked with him, as Dick often did, and as I have occasionally done, through the fields, and heard him expatiate—quietly enough—on the trees and flowers, you would not be surprised at the turn taken by his son's genius."

Thus, then, the boy was born; in an ancient farmhouse beautiful to look upon, with beautiful fields and gardens round it; in the midst

of a most singular and interesting country, wilder than any other part of England except the Peak and Dartmoor; encouraged by his father to observe and to remember; taught by him to read the Book of Nature. What better beginning could the boy have had? There wanted but one thing to complete his happiness—a little more ease as regards money. I fear that one of the earliest things the boy could remember must have been connected with pecuniary embarrassment.

While still a child, four years of age, he was taken to live under the charge of an aunt, Mrs. Harrild, at Sydenham. He stayed with her for some years, going home to Coate every summer for a month. At Sydenham he went to a preparatory school kept by a lady. He was then at the age of seven, but he had learned to read long before. He does not seem to have gained the character of precocity or exceptional cleverness at school, but Mrs. Harrild remembers that he was always as a child reading and drawing, and would amuse himself for hours at a time over some old volume of "Punch," or the "Illustrated London News,"

or, indeed, anything he could get. He had a splendid memory, was even so early a great observer, and was always a most truthful child, strong in his likes and dislikes. But he possessed a highly nervous and sensitive temperament, was hasty and quick-tempered, impulsive, and, withal, very reserved. All these qualities remained with Richard Jefferies to the end; he was always reserved, always sensitive, always nervous, always quick-tempered. In his case, indeed, the child was truly father to the man. It is pleasant to record that he repaid the kindness of his aunt with the affection of a son, keeping up a constant correspondence with her. His letters, indeed, are sometimes like a diary of his life, as will be seen from the extracts I shall presently make from them.

At the age of nine the boy went home for good. He was then sent to school at Swindon.

A letter from which I have already quoted thus speaks of him at the age of ten:

"There was a summer-house of conical shape in one corner paved with 'kidney'

stones. This was used by the boys as a treasure-house, where darts, bows and arrows, wooden swords, and other instruments used in mimic warfare were kept. Two favourite pastimes were those of living on a desert island, and of waging war with wild Indians. Dick was of a masterful temperament, and though less strong than several of us in a bodily sense, his force of will was such that we had to succumb to whatever plans he chose to dictate, never choosing to be second even in the most trivial thing. His temper was not amiable, but there was always a gentleness about him which saved him from the reproach of wishing to ride rough-shod over the feelings of others. I do not recollect his ever joining in the usual boy's sports—cricket or football—he preferred less athletic, if more adventurous, means of enjoyment. He was a great reader, and I remember a sunny parlour window, almost like a room, where many books of adventure and fairy tales were read by him. Close to his home was the 'Reservoir,' a prettily-situated lake surrounded by trees, and with many romantic nooks on the banks. Here we often

used to go on exploring expeditions in quest of curiosities or wild Indians."

Here we get at the origin of "Bevis." Those who have read that romance—which, if it were better proportioned and shorter, would be the most delightful boy's book in the world—will remember how the lads played and made pretence upon the shores and waters of the lake. Now they are travellers in the jungle of wild Africa; now they come upon a crocodile; now they hear close by the roar of a lion; now they discern traces of savages; now they go into hiding; now they discover a great inland sea; now they build a hut and live upon a desert island. The man at thirty-six recalls every day of his childhood, and makes a story out of it for other children.

One of the things which he did was to make a canoe for himself with which to explore the lake. To make a canoe would be beyond the powers of most boys; but then most boys are brought up in a crowd, and can do nothing except play cricket and football. The shaping of the canoe is described in "After London":

"He had chosen the black poplar for the canoe because it was the lightest wood, and would float best. To fell so large a tree had been a great labour, for the axes were of poor quality, cut badly, and often required sharpening. He could easily have ordered half a dozen men to throw the tree, and they would have obeyed immediately; but then the individuality and interest of the work would have been lost. Unless he did it himself its importance and value to him would have been diminished. It had now been down some weeks, had been hewn into outward shape, and the larger part of the interior slowly dug away with chisel and gouge.

"He had commenced while the hawthorn was just putting forth its first spray, when the thickets and the trees were yet bare. Now the May bloom scented the air, the forest was green, and his work approached completion. There remained, indeed, but some final shaping and rounding off, and the construction, or rather cutting out, of a secret locker in the stern. This locker was nothing more than a square aperture chiselled out like a mortise,

entering not from above, but parallel with the bottom, and was to be closed with a tight-fitting piece of wood driven in by force of mallet.

"A little paint would then conceal the slight chinks, and the boat might be examined in every possible way without any trace of this hiding-place being observed. The canoe was some eleven feet long, and nearly three feet in the beam; it tapered at either end, so that it might be propelled backwards or forwards without turning, and stem and stern (interchangeable definitions in this case) each rose a few inches higher than the general gunwale. The sides were about two inches thick, the bottom three, so that although dug out from light wood, the canoe was rather heavy."

"As a boy," to quote again from the same letter, "he was no great talker; but if we could get him in the humour, he would tell us racy and blood-curdling romances. There was one particular spot on the Coate road—many years ago a quarry, afterwards deserted—upon which he wove many fancies, with murders and ghosts. Always, in going home after one

of our visits to the farm, we used to think we heard the clanking chains or ringing hoof of the phantom horse careering after us, and we would rush on in full flight from the fateful spot."

His principal companion in boyhood was his next brother, younger than himself by one year only, but very different in manners, appearance, and in tastes. He describes both himself and his brother in "After London." Felix is himself; Oliver is his brother.

This is Felix:

"Independent and determined to the last degree, Felix ran any risk rather than surrender that which he had found, and which he deemed his own. This unbending independence and pride of spirit, together with scarce-concealed contempt for others, had resulted in almost isolating him from the youth of his own age, and had caused him to be regarded with dislike by the elders. He was rarely, if ever, asked to join the chase, and still more rarely invited to the festivities and amusements provided in adjacent houses, or to the grander entertainments of the higher nobles.

Too quick to take offence where none was really intended, he fancied that many bore him ill-will who had scarcely given him a passing thought. He could not forgive the coarse jokes uttered upon his personal appearance by men of heavier build, who despised so slender a stripling.

"He would rather be alone than join their company, and would not compete with them in any of their sports, so that, when his absence from the arena was noticed, it was attributed to weakness or cowardice. These imputations stung him deeply, driving him to brood within himself."

And this is Oliver :

"Oliver's whole delight was in exercise and sport. The boldest rider, the best swimmer, the best at leaping, at hurling the dart or the heavy hammer, ever ready for tilt or tournament, his whole life was spent with horse, sword, and lance. A year younger than Felix, he was at least ten years physically older. He measured several inches more round the chest ; his massive shoulders and

immense arms, brown and hairy, his powerful limbs, tower-like neck, and somewhat square jaw were the natural concomitants of enormous physical strength.

"All the blood and bone and thew and sinew of the house seemed to have fallen to his share; all the fiery, restless spirit and defiant temper; all the utter recklessness and warrior's instinct. He stood every inch a man, with dark, curling, short-cut hair, brown cheek and Roman chin, trimmed moustache, brown eye, shaded by long eyelashes and well-marked brows; every inch a natural king of men. That very physical preponderance and animal beauty was perhaps his bane, for his comrades were so many, and his love adventures so innumerable, that they left him no time for serious ambition.

"Between the brothers there was the strangest mixture of affection and repulsion. The elder smiled at the excitement and energy of the younger; the younger openly despised the studious habits and solitary life of the elder. In time of real trouble and difficulty they would have been drawn together; as it was,

there was little communion; the one went his way, and the other his. There was perhaps rather an inclination to detract from each other's achievements than to praise them, a species of jealousy or envy without personal dislike, if that can be understood. They were good friends, and yet kept apart.

"Oliver made friends of all, and thwacked and banged his enemies into respectful silence. Felix made friends of none, and was equally despised by nominal friends and actual enemies. Oliver was open and jovial; Felix reserved and contemptuous, or sarcastic in manner. His slender frame, too tall for his width, was against him; he could neither lift the weights nor undergo the muscular strain readily borne by Oliver. It was easy to see that Felix, although nominally the eldest, had not yet reached his full development. A light complexion, fair hair and eyes, were also against him; where Oliver made conquests, Felix was unregarded. He laughed, but perhaps his secret pride was hurt."

After his return from Sydenham the boy, as I have said, went to school for a year or two

at Swindon. Then he presently began to read. He had always delighted in books, especially in illustrated books; now he began to read everything that he could get.

The boy who reads everything, the boy who takes out his younger brothers and his cousins and makes them all pretend as he pleases, see what he orders them to see, and shudder at his bidding and at the creatures of his own imagination—what sort of future is in store for that boy? And think of what his life might have become had he been forced into clerkery or into trade: how crippled, miserable, and cramped! It is indeed miserable to think of the thousands designed for a life of art, of letters, of open air, or of science, wasted and thrown away in labouring at the useless desk or the hateful counter.

This boy therefore read everything. Presently, when he had read all that there was at Coate, and all that his grandfather had to lend him, he began to borrow of everybody and to buy. It is perfectly wonderful, as everybody knows, how a boy who never seems to get any money manages to buy books. The fact is that

all boys get money, but the boy who wants books saves his pennies. For twopence you can very often pick up a book that you want ; for sixpence you can have a choice ; a shilling will tempt a second-hand bookseller to part with what seems a really valuable book ; half-a-crown —but such a boy never even sees a half-crown piece. Richard Jefferies differed in one respect from most boys who read everything. They live in the world of books ; the outer world does not exist for them ; the birds sing, the lambs spring, the flowers blossom, but they heed them not ; they grow short-sighted over the small print ; they become more and more enamoured of phrase, captivated by words, charmed by style, so that they forget the things around them. When they go abroad they enact the fable of "Eyes and No Eyes," playing the less desirable part. Jefferies, on the other hand, was preserved from this danger. His father, the reserved and meditative man, took him into the fields and turned over page after page with him of the book of Nature, expounding, teaching, showing him how to use his eyes, and con-

tinually reading to him out of that great book.

So a strange thing came to pass. Most of us who go away from our native place forget it, or we only remember it from time to time; the memory grows dim; when we go back we are astonished to find how much we have forgotten, and how distorted are the memories which remain. Richard Jefferies, however, who presently left Coate, never forgot the old place. It remained with him—every tree, every field, every hill, every patch of wild thyme—all through his life, clear and distinct, as if he had left it but an hour before. In almost everything he wrote Coate is in his mind. Even in his book of "Wild Life Round London" the reader thinks sometimes that he is on the wild Wiltshire Downs, while the wind whistles in his ears, and the lark is singing in the sky, and far, far away the sheep-bells tinkle.

Why, in the very last paper which he ever wrote—it appeared in *Longman's Magazine* two months after his death—his memory goes back to the hamlet where he was born. He

recalls the cottage where John Brown lived—you can see it still, close to Coate—as well as that where Job lived who kept the shop and was always buying and selling; and of the water-bailiff who looked after the great pond:

"There were one or two old boats, and he used to leave the oars leaning against a wall at the side of the house. These oars looked like fragments of a wreck, broken and irregular. The right-hand scull was heavy as if made of ironwood, the blade broad and spoon-shaped, so as to have a most powerful grip of the water. The left-hand scull was light and slender, with a narrow blade like a marrow-scoop; so when you had the punt, you had to pull very hard with your left hand and gently with the right to get the forces equal. The punt had a list of its own, and no matter how you rowed, it would still make leeway. Those who did not know its character were perpetually trying to get this crooked wake straight, and consequently went round and round exactly like the whirligig beetle. Those who knew used to let the leeway proceed a good

way and then alter it, so as to act in the other direction like an elongated zigzag. These sculls the old fellow would bring you as if they were great treasures, and watch you off in the punt as if he was parting with his dearest. At that date it was no little matter to coax him round to unchain his vessel. You had to take an interest in the garden, in the baits, and the weather, and be very humble; then perhaps he would tell you he did not want it for the trimmers, or the withy, or the flags, and you might have it for an hour as far as he could see; 'did not think my lord's steward would come over that morning; of course, if he did you must come in,' and so on; and if the stars were propitious, by-the-bye, the punt was got afloat."

Then the writer—he was a dying man—sings his song of lament because the past is past—and dead. All that is past, and that we shall never see again, is dead. The brook that used to leap and run and chatter—it is dead. The trees that used to put on new leaves every spring—they are dead. All is

dead and swept away, hamlet and cottage, hillside and coppice, field and hedge.

"I think I have heard that the oaks are down. They may be standing or down, it matters nothing to me; the leaves I last saw upon them are gone for evermore, nor shall I ever see them come there again ruddy in spring. I would not see them again even if I could; they could never look again as they used to do. There are too many memories there. The happiest days become the saddest afterwards; let us never go back, lest we too die. There are no such oaks anywhere else, none so tall and straight, and with such massive heads, on which the sun used to shine as if on the globe of the earth, one side in shadow, the other in bright light. How often I have looked at oaks since, and yet have never been able to get the same effect from them! Like an old author printed in other type, the words are the same, but the sentiment is different. The brooks have ceased to run. There is no music now at the old hatch where we used to sit in danger of our lives, happy as kings, on

the narrow bar over the deep water. The barred pike that used to come up in such numbers are no more among the flags. The perch used to drift down the stream, and then bring up again. The sun shone there for a very long time, and the water rippled and sang, and it always seemed to me that I could feel the rippling and the singing and the sparkling back through the centuries. The brook is dead, for when man goes nature ends. I dare say there is water there still, but it is not the brook; the brook is gone like John Brown's soul. There used to be clouds over the fields, white clouds in blue summer skies. I have lived a good deal on clouds; they have been meat to me often; they bring something to the spirit which even the trees do not. I see clouds now sometimes when the iron grip of hell permits for a minute or two; they are very different clouds, and speak differently. I long for some of the old clouds that had no memories. There were nights in those times over those fields, not darkness, but Night, full of glowing suns and glowing richness of life that sprang up to meet them. The nights are

there still; they are everywhere, nothing local in the night; but it is not the Night to me seen through the window."

Nobody believes him, he says. People ask him if such a village ever existed—of course, it never existed. What beautiful picture ever really existed save in the sunrise and in the sunset sky? Those living in the place about which these wonderful things are written look at each other in amazement, and ask what they mean. All this about Coate? Why, here are only half a dozen cottages, mean and squalid, with thatched roofs; and beyond the hedge are only fields with a great pond and bare hills beyond. "No one else," says Jefferies, "seems to have seen the sparkle on the brook, or heard the music at the hatch, or to have felt back through the centuries; and when I try to describe these things to them they look at me with stolid incredulity. No one seems to understand how I got food from the clouds, nor what there was in the night, nor why it is not so good to look out of window. They turn their faces away from

me, so that perhaps, after all, I was mistaken, and there never was any such place, or any such meadows, and I was never there. And perhaps in course of time I shall find out also, when I pass away physically, that as a matter of fact there never was any earth." That, indeed, will be the most curious discovery possible in the after-world. No earth—then no Coate; no "Wild Life in a Southern County," and no "Gamekeeper at Home," because there has never been any home for any gamekeeper.

I have dwelt at some length upon these early years of Jefferies' life because they are all-important. They explain the whole of his after-life; they show how the book of Nature was laid open to this man in a way that it was never before presented to any man who had also the divine gift of utterance, namely, by a man who, though steeped in the wisdom of the field and forest—though he had read indeed in the book—could not read it aloud for all to hear.

In order to read this book aright, one must live apart from one's fellow-men and remain

a stranger to their ambitions, ignorant of their crooked ways, their bickerings, and their pleasures. One must have quick and observant eyes, trained to watch and mark the infinite changes and variations in Nature, day by day; one must go to Nature's school from infancy in order to get this power. Nay; one must never cease to exercise this power, or it will be lost; it must be continually nourished and strengthened by being exercised. If one who has this power should go to live in the city, his eyes would grow as sluggish and as dim as ours; his ear would be blunted by the rolling of the carts, and his mind disturbed by the rush and the activity of the crowd. Again, if one who had this power should abandon the simple life, and should deaden his senses with luxury, sloth, and vice, he would quickly lose it. He *must* live apart from men; all day long the sun must burn his cheek, the wind must blow upon it, the rain must beat upon it; he must never be out of reach of the fragrant wild flowers and the call and cry of the birds. Of such men literature can show but two or three—Gilbert White, Thoreau,

and Jefferies—but the greatest of them all is Jefferies. No one before him has so lived among the fields; no one has heard so clearly the song of the flowers and the weeds and the blades of grass. The million million blades of grass spoke to Jefferies as the Oak of Dodona spoke through its thousand leaves. When he went home he sat down and was inspired to translate that language, and to tell the world what the grass says and sings to him who can hear.

He who met the great God Pan face to face fell down dead. Still, even in these days, he who communes with the Sylvan Spirit presently dies to the ways of men, while his senses are opened to see the hidden things of hedge and meadow; while his soul is uplifted by the beauty and the variety and the order of the world; by the wondrous lives of the creatures, so full of peril, and so full of joy. Then, if he be permitted to reveal these things, what can we who receive this revelation give in exchange? What words of praise and gratitude can we find in return for this unfolding of the Book of Fleeting Life?

As for us, we listened to the voice of this master for ten years; we shall hear no more of his discourses; but the old ones remain; we can go back to them again and again. It is the quality of truthful work that it never grows old or stale; one can return to it again and again; there is always something fresh in it, something new. In a great poem the lines always bring some new thought to the mind; in great music, the harmonies always call forth some fresh emotion, and inspire some new thought; in a true book there is always some new truth to be discovered. If all the rest of the literature of this day prove ephemeral and is doomed to swift oblivion, the work of Jefferies shall not perish. Our fashions change, and the things of which we write become old and pass away. But the everlasting hills abide, and the meadows still lie green and flowery, and the roses and wild honeysuckle still blossom in the hedge. And those who have written of these are so few, and their words are so precious, that they shall not pass away, so long as their tongue endureth to be spoken and to be read.

CHAPTER II.

SIXTEEN TO TWENTY.

At the age of sixteen, Richard Jefferies had an adventure—almost the only adventure of his quiet life. It was an adventure which could only happen to a youth of strong imagination, capable of seeing no difficulties or dangers, and refusing to accept the word "impossible."

At this time he was a long and loose-limbed lad, regarded by his own family as at least an uncommon youth and a subject of anxiety as to his future, a boy who talked eagerly of things far beyond the limits of the farm, who was self-willed and masterful, whose ideas astonished and even irritated those whose thoughts were accustomed to move in a narrow, unchanging groove. He was also a boy, as

we have seen, who had the power of imposing his own imagination upon others, even those of sluggish temperament—as Don Quixote overpowered the slow brain of Sancho Panza.

Richard Jefferies then, at the age of sixteen, conceived a magnificent scheme, the like of which never before entered a boy's brain. Above all things he wanted to see foreign countries. He therefore proposed to another lad nothing less than to undertake a walk through the whole of Europe, as far as Moscow and back again. The project was discussed and debated long and seriously. At last it was referred to the decision of the dog as to an oracle. In this way: if the dog wagged his tail within a certain time, they would go; if the dog's tail remained quiet, it should be taken as a warning or premonition against the journey. Reliance should never, as a matter of fact, be placed in the oracle of the dog's tail; but this the lads were too young to understand. The tail wagged. The boys ran away. It was on November 11, in the year 1864. Now, here, certain details of the story are wanting. The novelist is never happy unless the whole

machinery of his tale is clear in his own mind. And I confess that I know not how the two boys raised the money with which to pay their preliminary expenses. You may support yourself, as Oliver Goldsmith did, by a flute or a fiddle, you may depend upon the benefactions of unknown kind hearts in a strange land, but the steamship company and the railway company must be always paid beforehand. Where did the passage-money come from? Nay, as you will learn presently, there must have been quite a large bag of money to start with. Where did it come from? The other boy—the unknown—the *innominatus*—doubtless found that bag of gold.

They got to Dover and they crossed the Channel, and they actually began their journey. But I know not how far they got, nor how long a time, exactly, they spent in France—about a week, it would seem. They very quickly, however, made the humiliating discovery that they could not understand a word that was said to them, nor could they, save by signs, make themselves understood. Therefore they relinquished the idea of walking to

Moscow, and reluctantly returned. But they would not go home; perhaps, because they were still athirst for adventure; perhaps, because they were ashamed. They then saw an advertisement in a newspaper which fired their imaginations again. The advertiser undertook, for an absurdly small sum, to take them across to New York. The amount named was just within the compass of their money. They resolved to see America instead of Russia; they called at the agent's office and paid their fares. Their tickets took them free to Liverpool, whither they repaired. Unfortunately, when they reached Liverpool, they learned that the tickets did not include bedding of any kind, or provisions, so that if they went on board they would certainly be frozen and starved. What was to be done? They had no more money. They could not get their money returned. They were helpless. They resolved therefore to give up the whole project, and to go home again. Jefferies undertook to pawn their watches in order to get the money for the railway ticket. His appearance and manner, for some reason or other—pawning

being doubtless a new thing with him—roused so much suspicion in the mind of the pawnbroker that he actually gave the lad into custody. Happily, the superintendent of police believed his story—probably a telegram to Swindon strengthened his faith; he himself advanced them the money, keeping the watches as security, and sent them home after an expedition which lasted a fortnight altogether. There is no doubt as to the facts of the case. The boys did actually start, with intent to march all the way across Europe as far as Russia and back again. But how they began, how they raised the money to pay the preliminary expenses, wants more light. Also, there is no record as to their reception after they got home again. One suspects somehow that on this occasion the fatted calf was allowed to go on growing.

It must have been about this time that the lad began to have his bookish learning remarked and respected, if not encouraged. One of the upper rooms of the farmhouse—the other was the cheese-room—was set apart for him alone. Here he had his books, his table, his desk, and

his bed. This room was sacred. Here he read; here he spent all his leisure time in reading. He read during this period an immense quantity. Shakespeare, Chaucer, Scott, Byron, Dryden, Voltaire, Goethe — he was never tired of reading Faust—and it is said, but I think it must have been in translation, that he read most of the Greek and Latin masters. It is evident from his writings that he had read a great deal, yet he lacks the touch of the trained scholar. That cannot be attained by solitary and desultory reading, however omnivorous. His chief literary adviser in those days was Mr. William Morris, of Swindon, proprietor and editor of the *North Wilts Advertiser*. Mr. Morris is himself the author of several works, among others a "History of Swindon," and, as becomes a literary man with such surroundings, he is a well-known local antiquary. Mr. Morris allowed the boy, who was at school with his own son, the run of his own library; he lent him books, and he talked with him on subjects which, one can easily understand, were not topics of conversation at Coate. Afterwards, when Jefferies had already

become reporter for the local press, it was the perusal of a descriptive paper by Mr. Morris, on the "Lakes of Killarney," which decided the lad upon seriously attempting the literary career.

What inclined the lad to become a journalist? First of all, the narrow family circumstances prevented his being brought up to one of the ordinary professions: he might have become a clerk; he might have gone to London, where he had friends in the printing business; he might have emigrated, as his brother afterwards did; he might have gone into some kind of trade. As for farming, he had no taste for it; the idea of becoming a farmer never seems to have occurred to him as possible. But he could not bear the indoor life; to be chained all day long to a desk would have been intolerable to him; it would have killed him; he needed such a life as would give him a great deal of time in the open air. Such he found in journalism. His friend, Mr. Morris, gave him the first start by printing for him certain sketches and descriptive papers. And he had the courage to learn shorthand.

He had already before this begun to write.

"I remember"—I quote from a letter which has already furnished information about these early days—"that he once showed his brother a roll of manuscript which he said 'meant money' some day." It was necessary in that house to think of money first.

I wonder what that manuscript was. Perhaps poetry—a clever lad's first attempt at verse; there is never a clever lad who does not try his hand at verse. Perhaps it was a story—we shall see that he wrote many stories. At that time his handwriting was so bad that when he began to feed the press, the compositors bought him a copybook and a penholder and begged him to use it. He did use it, and his handwriting presently became legible at least, but it remained to the end a bad handwriting. His note-books especially are very hard to read.

He was left by his father perfectly free and uncontrolled. He was allowed to do what he pleased or what he could find to do. This liberty of action made him self-reliant. It also, perhaps, increased his habit of solitude

and reserve. In those days he used to draw a great deal, and is said to have acquired considerable power in pen-and-ink sketches, but I have never seen any of them.

At this period he was careless as to his dress and appearance; he suffered his hair to grow long until it reached his coat collar. "This," says one who knew him then, "with his bent form and long, rapid stride, made him an object of wonder in the town of Swindon. But he was perfectly unconscious of this, or indifferent to it."

Later on, he understood better the necessity of paying attention to personal appearance, and in his advice to the young journalist he points out that he should be quietly but well dressed, and that he should study genial manners.

In appearance Richard Jefferies was very tall—over six feet. He was always thin. At the age of seventeen his friends feared that he would go into a decline, which was happily averted—perhaps through his love for the open air. His hair was dark-brown; his beard was brown, with a shade of auburn; his forehead both high and broad; his features strongly marked; his nose long, clear, and straight;

his lower lip thick ; his eyebrows distinguished by the meditative droop ; his complexion was fair, with very little colour. The most remarkable feature in his face was his large and clear blue eye ; it was so full that it ought to have been short-sighted, yet his sight was far as well as keen. His face was full of thought ; he walked with somewhat noiseless tread and a rapid stride. He never carried an umbrella or wore a great-coat, nor, except in very cold weather, did he wear gloves. He had great powers of endurance in walking, but his physical strength was never great. In manner, as has been already stated, he was always reserved ; at this time so much so as to appear morose to those who knew him but slightly. He made few friends. Indeed, all through life he made fewer friends than any other man. This was really because, for choice, he always lived as much in the country as possible, and partly because he had no sympathy with the ordinary pursuits of men. Such a man as Richard Jefferies could never be clubable. What would he talk about at the club ? The theatre ? He never went there. Literature

of the day? He seldom read it. Politics? He belonged to the people, and cursed either party. That once said, he had nothing more to say. Art? He had ideas of his own on painting, and they were unconventional. Gossip and scandal? He never heard any. Wine? He knew nothing about wine. Yet to those whom he knew and trusted he was neither reserved nor morose. An eremite would be driven mad by chatter if he left his hermitage and came back to his native town; so this roamer among the hills could not endure the profitless talk of man, while Nature was willing to break her silence for him alone among the hills and in the woods.

He became, then, a journalist. It is a profession which leaves large gaps in the day, and sometimes whole days of leisure. The work, to such a lad as Jefferies, was easy; he had to attend meetings and report them; to write descriptive papers; to furnish and dress up paragraphs of news; to look about the town and pick up everything that was said or done; to attend the police courts, inquests, county courts, auctions, markets, and every-

thing. The life of a country journalist is busy, but it is in great measure an out-door life.

Although Mr. Morris was his first literary friend and adviser, Jefferies was never attached to his paper as reporter. Perhaps there was no vacancy at the time. He obtained work on the *North Wilts Herald*, and afterwards became in addition the Swindon correspondent of the *Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard*, published at Cirencester. The editor of the *North Wilts Herald* was a Mr. Piper, who died two years ago. Of him Jefferies always spoke with the greatest respect, calling him his old master. But in what sense he himself was a pupil I know not. Nor can I gather that Jefferies, who acquired his literary style much later, and after, as will be seen, the production of much work which has deservedly fallen into oblivion, learned anything as a writer from anybody. In the line which he afterwards struck out for himself—that of observations of nature—his master, as regards the subject-matter, was his father; as regards his style he had no master.

He filled these posts and occupied himself

in this kind of work between the years 1865 and 1877.

But he did other things as well, showing that he never intended to sit down in ignoble obscurity as the reporter of a country newspaper.

I have before me a little book called "Reporting, Editing, and Authorship," published without date at Swindon, and by John Snow and Co., Ivy Lane, London. I think it appeared in the year 1872, when he was in his twenty-fourth year. It is, however, the work of a very young man; the kind of work at which you must not laugh, although it amuses you, because it is so very much in earnest, and at the same time so very elementary. You see before you in these pages the ideal reporter—Jefferies was always zealous to do everything that he had to do as well as it could be done. It is divided into three chapters, but the latter two are vague and tentative, compared with the first. The little book should have been called, "He would be an Author."

"Let the aspirant," he says, "begin with

acquiring a special knowledge of his own district. The power and habit of doing this may subsequently stand him in good stead as a war-correspondent. Let him next study the trade and industries peculiar to the place. If he is able to write of these graphically, he will acquire a certain connection and good-will among the masters. He will strengthen himself if he contributes papers upon these subjects to the daily papers or to the magazines; thus he will grow to be regarded as a representative man. Next, he should study everywhere the topography, antiquities, traditions, and general characteristics of the country wherever he goes; he should visit the churches, and write about them. He may go on to write a local history, or he may take a local tradition and weave a story round about it—things which local papers readily publish. Afterwards he may write more important tales for country newspapers, and so by easy stages rise to the grandeur of writing tales for the monthly magazines." Observe that so far the ambition of the writer is wholly in the direction of novels.

One piece of advice contrasts strongly with the description of him given by his cousin. He has found out that eccentricity of appearance and manner does not advance a man. Therefore he writes :

"A good personal manner greatly conduces to the success of the reporter. He should be pleasant and genial, but not loud : inquiring without being inquisitive : bold, but not presumptuous : and above all respectful. The reporter should be able to talk on all subjects with all men. He should dress well, because it obtains him immediate attention : but should be careful to avoid anything 'horsey' or fast. The more gentlemanly his appearance and tone, the better he will be received."

The chapter on Editing gives a tolerably complete account of the conduct of a country-town newspaper. The chapter on Authorship is daring, because the writer as yet knew nothing whatever of the subject. Among other mistakes is the very common one of supposing that a young man can help himself on by publishing at his own expense a manu-

script which all the respectable publishing houses have refused. He himself subsequently acted upon this mistake, and lost his money without in the least advancing his reputation. The young writer can seldom be made to understand that all publishers are continually on the look-out for good work ; that good work is almost certain (though mistakes have been made) to be taken up by the first publisher to whom it is offered ; that if it is refused by good Houses, the reason is that it is not good work, and that paying for publication will not turn bad work into good. Jefferies concludes his little book by so shocking a charge against the general public that it shall be quoted just to show what this country lad of nineteen or twenty thought was the right and knowing thing to say about them :

"The public will read any commonplace clap-trap if only a well-known name be attached to it. Hence any amount of expenditure is justified with this object. It is better at once to realize the fact, however unpleasant it may be to the taste, and instead of trying

to win the good-will of the public by laborious work, treat literature as a trade, which, like other trades, requires an immense amount of advertising."

This is Jefferies' own ideal of a journalist. In March, 1866, being then eighteen years of age, he began his work on the *North Wilts Herald*.

CHAPTER III.

LETTERS FROM 1866 TO 1872.

THE principal sources of information concerning the period of early manhood are the letters—a large number of these are happily preserved—which he wrote to his aunt, Mrs. Harrild. In these letters, which are naturally all about himself, his work, his hopes, and his disappointments, he writes with perfect freedom and from his heart. It is still a boyish heart, young and innocent. "I always feel dull," he says, "when I leave you. I am happier with you than at home, because you enter into my prospects with interest and are always kind. . . . I wish I could have got something to do in the neighbourhood of Sydenham, which would have enabled me to live with you."

The letters reveal a youth taken too soon from school, but passionately fond of reading—

of industry and application intense and unwearied; he confesses his ambitions—they are for success; he knows that he has the power of success within him; he tries for success continually, and is as often beaten back, because, though this he cannot understand, in the way he tries success is impossible for him. Let us run through this bundle of letters.

One thing to him who reads the whole becomes immediately apparent, though it is not so clear from the extracts alone. It is the self-consciousness of the writer as regards style. That is because he is intended by nature to become a writer. He thinks how he may put things to the best advantage; he understands the importance of phrase; he wants not only to say a thing, but to say it in a striking and uncommon manner. Later on, when he has gotten a style to himself, he becomes more familiar and chatty. Thus, for instance, the boy speaks of the great organ at the Crystal Palace: "To me music is like a spring of fresh water in the midst of the desert to a wearied Arab." He was genuinely and truly fond of good music, and yet this phrase has in

it a note of unreality. Again, he is speaking of one of his aunt's friends, and says, as if he was the author of "Evelina": "How is Mr. A.? I remember him as a pleasant gentleman, anxious not to give trouble, and the result is . . ." and so forth. When one understands that these letters were written by the immature writer, such little things, with which they abound, are pleasing.

In March, 1866, he describes the commencement of his work on the *North Wilts Herald;* he speaks of the kindness of his chief and the pleasant nature of his work. In December of the same year he sends a story which he wants his uncle to submit to a London magazine. In June, 1867, he writes that he has completed his "History of Swindon" and its neighbourhood. This probably appeared in the pages of his newspaper.

In the same year he says that he has finished a story called "Malmesbury."

"Here I have no books—no old monkish records to assist me — everything must be hunted out upon the spot. I visit every place I have to refer to, copy inscriptions, listen to

legends, examine antiquities, measure this, estimate that; and a thousand other employments essential to a correct account take up my time. The walking I can do is something beyond belief. To give an instance. There is a book published some twenty years ago founded on a local legend. This I wanted, and have actually been to ten different houses in search of it; that is, have had a good fifty miles' walk, and as yet all in vain. However, I think I am on the right scent now, and believe I shall get it.

"This neighbourhood is a mine for an antiquary. I was given to understand at school that in ancient days Britain was a waste—uninhabited, rude and savage. I find this is a mistake. I see traces of former habitation, and former generations, in all directions. There, Roman coins; here, British arrowheads, tumuli, camps—in short, the country, if I may use the expression, seems alive with the dead. I am inclined to believe that this part of North Wilts, at least, was as thickly inhabited of yore as it is now, the difference being only in the spots inhabited having been exchanged for

others more adapted to the wants of the times. I do not believe these sweeping assertions as to the barbarous state of our ancestors. The more I study the matter the more absurd and unfounded appear the notions popularly received."

"The spiders have been more disturbed in the last few days than for twelve months past. I detest this cruelty to spiders. I admire these ingenious insects. One individual has taken possession of a box of mine. This fellow I call Cæsar Borgia, because he has such an affection for blood. You will call him a monster, which is praise, since his size shows the number of flies he has destroyed. Why not keep a spider as well as a cat? They are both useful in their way, and a spider has this advantage, that he will spin you a web which will do instead of tapestry."

Between July 21st and September 2nd of this year he writes of a bad illness which sent him to bed and kept him there, until he became as thin as a skeleton. As soon as he was able to get out of bed he wrote to his aunt; his eyes were weak, and he could read

but little, which was a dreadful privation for him. And he was most anxious lest he should lose his post on the paper.

Later on he tells the good news that Mr. Piper will give him another fortnight so that he may get a change of air and a visit to Sydenham.

He goes back to Swindon apparently strengthened and in his former health and energy. Besides his journal work he reports himself engaged upon an "Essay on Instinct." This is the first hint of his finding out his own line, which, however, he would not really discover for a long time yet.

"The country," he says, little thinking what the country was going to do for him, "is very quiet and monotonous. There is a sublime sameness in Coate that reminds you of the stars that rise and set regularly just as we go to bed down here."

His grandfather—old Iden of "Amaryllis"—died in April, 1868.

He speaks in June of his own uncertain prospects.

"My father," he says, "will neither tell me

what he would like done or anything else, so that I go my own way and ask nobody. . . ." The letters are full of the little familiar gossip concerning this person and that, but he can never resist the temptation of telling his aunt —who "enters into his prospects"—all that he is doing. He has now spent two months over a novel—this young man thinks that two months is a prodigiously long time to give to a novel. "I have taken great pains with it," he says, "and flatter myself that I have produced a tale of a very different class to those sensational stories I wrote some time ago. I have attempted to make my story lifelike by delineating character rather than by sensational incidents. My characters are many of them drawn from life, and some of my incidents actually took place." This is taking a step in the right direction. One wonders what this story was. But alas! there were so many in those days, and the end of all was the same. And yet the poor young author took such pains, such infinite pains, and all to no purpose, for he was still groping blindly in the dark, feeling for himself.

His health, however, gave way again. He tells his aunt that he has been fainting in church; that he finds his work too exciting; that his walking powers seem to have left him —everybody knows the symptoms when a young man outgrows his strength; he would like some quiet place; such a Haven of Repose or Castle of Indolence, for instance, as the Civil Service. All young men yearn at times for some place where there will be no work to do, and it speaks volumes for the happy administration of this realm that every young man in his yearning fondly turns his eyes to the Civil Service.

He has hopes, he says, of getting on to the reporting staff of the *Daily News*, ignorant of the truth that a single year of work on a great London paper would probably have finished him off for good. Merciful, indeed, are the gods, who grant to mankind, of all their prayers, so few.

In July he was prostrated by a terrible illness, aggravated by the great heat of that summer. This illness threatened to turn into consumption—a danger happily averted. But

it was many months before he could sit up and write to his aunt in pencil. He was at this time greatly under the influence of religion, and his letters are full of a boyish, simple piety. The hand of God is directing him, guiding him, punishing him. His heart is soft in thinking over the many consolations which his prayers have brought him, and of the increased benefit which he has derived from reading the Bible. He has passed through, he confesses, a period of scepticism, but that, he is happy to say, is now gone, never to return again.

He is able to get out of bed at last; he can read a little, though his eyes are weak; he can once more return to his old habits, and drinks his tea again as sweet as he can make it; he is able presently to seize his pen again. And then . . . then . . . is he not going to be a great author? And who knows in what direction? . . . then he begins a tragedy called "Cæsar Borgia; or, The King of Crime."

He is touched by the thoughtfulness of the cottagers. They have all called to ask after him; they have brought him honey. He resolves to cultivate the poor people more.

"After all," he says, with wisdom beyond his years, "books are dead; they should not be our whole study. Too much study is selfish."

Unfortunately the letters of the year 1869 have not been preserved; but we may very well understand that the lad spent that year in much the same way as the year before and the year after. That is to say, he wrote for his country paper; he reported; he collected local news; and he devoted his spare time to the writing of stories which were never to see the light, or, more unhappy still, to perish at their birth.

In the autumn of the year 1870 the letters begin again. He has now got money enough to give himself a holiday. He is at Hastings, and he is going across the water to Ostend. It is in September. The Prince Imperial of France is in the place, and Jefferies hopes to see him. There is a postscript with a characteristic touch: "I do not forget A——. Her large and beautiful eyes have haunted me ever since our visit to Worthing. Remember me to her, *but please do it privately; let no one*

else know what I have said of her. I hope to see her again."

Presently he did see the Prince, sitting at the window of his room in the Marine Hotel. The adventures which followed were, he says in his next letter, "almost beyond credibility."

You shall hear how wonderful they were. Lying in bed one night, a happy thought occurred to him. He would write some verses on the exile of the Prince.

". . . No sooner thought than done. I composed them that night, and wrote them out, and posted them the first thing next morning (Thursday). You say I am always either too precipitate or too procrastinating. At least, I lost no time in this. A day went by, and on Easter day there came a note to me at the hotel, from the aide-de-camp of the Prince, acknowledging the receipt of the verses, and saying that the Prince had been much pleased with them. You will admit this was about enough to turn a young author's head. Not being *au fait* in French, I took the note to a French lady professor, and she translated it for

me. I enclose the translation for you. But does not S. learn French? If so, it would be good practice for her to try and read the note. Please tell her to take care of it, as it cannot be replaced, and will be of great value to me in after-life. If I were seeking a place on a London paper the production of that note would be a wonderful recommendation. Well, the reception of that acknowledgment encouraged me, and on the following morning I set to work and wrote a letter to the Prince, communicating some rather important information which I had learnt whilst connected with the press. The result was a second letter from the aide-de-camp, this time dictated by the Empress Eugénie, who had read my note. I send you this letter too, and must beg you to carefully preserve it. I took it and had it translated by the same French lady, Madame ——, and I enclose her translation. She says that the expressions are very warm, and cannot be adequately rendered into English. She says it would be impossible to write more cordially in French than the Empress has done. Now came another

discovery. It came out in conversation with this French lady that she had actually been to school with the Empress in her youth; that they had played together, and been on picnics together. Her husband was a sea-commander, and she showed me his belt, etc. He served Napoleon when Napoleon was president, but protested against the *coup d'état* of 1851, and they had then to leave Paris. She had been unfortunate, and had now to earn her bread. She still preserves her husband's coat-of-arms, etc. Then came another discovery. It appeared that the equerries of the Empress (sixteen in number), unable to speak English, had seen her advertisement and came to her to act as interpreter. She did so. After a while it crept out that these rascals were abusing their employer behind her back, and even went the length of letting out private conversations they had overheard in the Tuileries, and at the Marine Hotel. She felt extremely indignant at this ungrateful conduct (for they are well paid and have three months' wages in advance), and she should like the Empress to know, but being so

poor she could not call on her old companion ; indeed, her pride would not permit. These were the men, she said, from whom the Prussians obtained intelligence ; and certainly they did act the part of spies. Other Frenchmen resident here met them at an inn, and they there detailed to them what they had learnt at the Marine Hotel. I persuaded her (she was in a terrible way, indignant and angry) to write to my friend, the aide-de-camp, and see him. She did so, and the consequence is that a number of these fellows have been discharged. The Empress and the Prince are still here, despite all paragraphs in the papers. They drove out yesterday afternoon. I saw them. . . ."

After this adventure Jefferies took the boat from Dover to Ostend. He had more adventures on the journey :

". . . It was a beautiful night, scarcely a breath of air, moonlight and starlit, and a calm sea. Every little wave that broke against the side flashed like lightning with the phosphoric light of the zoophytes, and when at eleven the paddles began to move, great circles of phosphoric

light surrounded the vessel. I was on deck all night, for instead of being four hours as advertised, the boat was eight hours at sea. After we had been out about four hours the sailors mistook a light on the horizon for Ostend, and steamed towards it. Presently the light rose higher, and proved to be the planet Venus, shining so brilliantly. At this moment an immense bank of fog enveloped us, so thick that one could scarcely see from one end of the ship to the other. The captain had lost his way, and the paddles were stopped. After a short time there was the sound of a cannon booming over the sea. Everyone rushed on deck, thinking of war and ironclads ; but it was the guns at Ostend, far away, firing to direct ships into port through the fog. It was now found that we had actually got about opposite Antwerp. So the ship was turned, and we slowly crept back, afraid of running on shore. Then, after an hour or two of this, we got into shallow water, and the lead was heaved every minute. The steam-whistle was sounded, and the guns on shore again fired. To our surprise, we had run past Ostend almost

as much the other way, thanks to the fog. Now I heard a bell ringing on shore—the matin bell—and you cannot imagine how strange that bell sounded. You must understand no shore was visible. More firing and whistling, until people began to think we should have to remain till the fog cleared. But I did not grumble ; rather, I was glad, for this delay gave me the opportunity of seeing the sun, just as the fog cleared, rise at sea—an indescribable sight :

> "'Then over the waste of water
> The morning sun uprose,
> Through the driving mist revealed,
> Like the lifting of the Host
> By incense clouds almost
> Concealed.'

A boat finally came off and piloted us into harbour, which we reached at seven o'clock Saturday morning — eight hours' passage. Numbers were ill—the ladies, most dreadfully ; I did not feel a qualm. I went on by the next train at 9.30 to Brussels, and reached it at one o'clock. . . ."

Brussels, at this moment, was full of French people mad with grief and excitement at the

conduct of the war and the disasters of their country. Jefferies does not appear, however, to have been much struck with the terror and pity of the situation. It was his first experience of foreign life, not counting his boyish escapade; his delight in the hotel, the *table d'hôte*, the wine, the brightness and apparent happiness of the Brussels people—they do somehow seem younger and happier than any other people in the world, except, perhaps, the Marseillais—is very vividly expressed. The ladies dazzle him; he thinks of "our London dowdies" and shudders; but alas! he cannot talk to them.

Then he goes back to Swindon, but not, for the present, to Coate. There is trouble at home. His father has to be brought round gradually to look at things from his son's point of view. Till that happy frame of mind has been arrived at he cannot go home. But his mother visits him, and so far as she is concerned all is well. He is out of work and has no money—two shillings and threepence can hardly be called money. Meantime, his mind is still excited by his recent experiences. He will never be happy in the country again;

he must find a place in London. It is the kind aunt who fills his purse with a temporary supply.

The following letter relates the difficulties of finding work :

". . . It is now four months since I last saw you, and during that time I have unremittingly endeavoured to get money by all the fair means I could think of. Scarcely a day has passed without making some attempt, or without maturing some plan, and yet all of them, as if by some kind of fate, have failed. I have written all sorts of things. Very few were rejected, but none brought any return. I have endeavoured to get employment, but there is none within reach. My old place has been filled up for months, and I could not recover it without resorting to unfair means, unless by some unforeseen accident. The other two papers here are sufficiently supplied with reporters, and though ready enough to receive my writings, don't pay a farthing. There remains a paper at Marlborough to which I applied. They were quite ready to

employ me, but said that, as their circulation at Swindon was very small, they could give but a small price—quoting a sum which absolutely would not buy me a dinner once a week. This was no good. Other papers further off refused entirely. As for answering advertisements, or seeking situations in other places, it was useless, from the following circumstance. In the autumn a large London paper failed, and the staff was thrown out. The consequence was, that the market became overstocked with reporters, and all vacancies were speedily filled. My next step was to try the London papers, especially the *Pall Mall*, with which I have had more or less connection for years. As I told you, three of the Dailies said if I were in town they could give me plenty of work, but not regular employment. In other words, one would employ me one day, another another, until an opening occurred for regular work. . . ."

There are other details showing that it was a terrible time of tightness. Threatenings of county court for a debt of £2 10s. ; personal

apparel falling to pieces ; work offered by the *Pall Mall Gazette* and other papers if he would go up to London. But how ? One must have enough to pay for board and lodging for a week, at least ; one must have enough for the railway-fare ; one must present a respectable appearance. And now only a single halfpenny left ! We have seen with sorrow how the young man had been already reduced to two shillings and three-pence. But this seems affluence when we look at that solitary halfpenny. Only a halfpenny ! Why, the coin will buy absolutely nothing.

Yet in this, the darkest hour, when he had no money and could get no work—when his own people had ceased to believe in him—he still continued to believe in himself. That kind of belief is a wonderful medicine in time of trouble. It is sovereign against low spirits, carelessness, and inactivity—the chief evils which follow on ill-success.

". . . I have still the firmest belief in my ultimate good-fortune and success. I believe in destiny. Not the fear of total indigence—for my father threatens to turn me out of doors

—nor the fear of disgrace and imprisonment for debt, can shake my calm indifference and belief in my good-fortune. Though I have but a halfpenny to-day, to-morrow I shall be rich. Besides, though I have had a severe cold, my health and strength are wonderful. Nothing earthly can hurt me. . . ."

The next letter was written in July of the same year, six months later. "I am very busy," he says, "getting well known as a writer. Both Swindon papers employ me; but I am chiefly occupied with my book. I work at it almost night and day. I feel sure it will succeed. If it does not, I know nothing that will, and I may as well at once give up the profession."

I do not think there is anything in the world more full of pity and interest than the spectacle of a clever young man struggling for literary success. He knows, somehow he feels in his heart, that he has the power. It is like a hidden spring which has to be found, or a secret force which has to be set in motion, or a lamp which has to be set alight. This young

man was feeling after that secret force; he was looking for that lamp. For eight long years he had been engaged in the search after this most precious of all treasures. What was it like—the noblest part of himself—that which would never die? Alas! he knew not. He hardly knew as yet that it was noble at all. So his search carried him continually farther from the thing which he would find.

On July 28 he writes a most joyful letter. He has achieved a feat which was really remarkable; in fact, he has actually received a letter from Mr. Disraeli himself on the subject of a work prepared by himself. It will be observed that by a natural confusion he mixes up the success of getting a letter from this statesman with the success of his book.

". . . I told you that I had been bending all my energies to the completion of a work. I completed it a short time since, and an opportunity offering, I wrote to Disraeli, describing it, and asking his opinion. You know he is considered the cleverest man in England; that he is the head of the rich and powerful

Conservative Party; and that he is a celebrated and very successful author. His reply came this morning:

"'Grosvenor Gate.

"'DEAR SIR,

"'The great pressure of public affairs at the present moment must be my excuse for not sooner replying to your interesting letter, which I did not like to leave to a secretary.

"'I think the subject of your work of the highest interest, and I should have confidence in its treatment from the letter which you have done me the honour of addressing to me. I should recommend you to forward your MS. to some eminent publisher whom interest and experience would qualify to judge of it with impartiality.

"'Believe me, dear sir,

"'With every good wish,

"'Your faithful servant,

"'B. DISRAELI.'

"A recognition like this from so great an intellectual leader is a richer reward to one's self than the applause of hundreds, or than any money can possibly be. And it is a guarantee

of success, even in a money sense; for what publisher would not grasp at a work commended by Disraeli? This is a day of triumph to me. In an obscure country village, personally totally unknown, name never heard of, without the least assistance from any living person, alone and unaided, I have achieved the favourable opinion of the man who stands highest in our age for intellectual power, who represents the nobility, gentry, and clergy of the land, who is the leader of half England. This, too, after enduring the sneers and bitter taunts of so many for idleness and incapacity. Hard, indeed, have I worked these many months since I last saw you, and at all times it has been my intention—and looked forward to as a reward—to write and tell you of my success. And at last—at last! Write to me and tell me you rejoice, for without someone to rejoice with you, success itself is cold and barren. My success is now assured. . . ."

A few days later he has to tell his aunt of another brilliant success of the same shadowy character. He calls it a "singular stroke of

good fortune." One of the best publishing houses in London had promised to consider his new novel—which of his new novels was it?—carefully.

"I cannot help thinking that their 'full consideration' is a very promising phrase. I really do think that I am now upon the threshold of success. . . . The idea of writing the book came to me by a kind of inspiration, and not from study or thought. I am now engaged upon a magazine article, which I think will meet the taste of the public. Since finishing the book, I have written a play which can either be published or acted, as circumstances prove most propitious. I have also sketched out a short tale, founded on fact, and have sent the MS. of a history of Swindon to the local paper, and expect a fair sum for it. I am engaged to go to Gloucester next week for a day—perhaps two—to report a trial. So that you see I am not idle, and have my hands as full as they can hold."

Quite as full as they can hold; and all the time he is drifting further and further from

the haven where he would be. Yet his fortune lies at his feet, if he will but stoop to pick it up. It lies in the hedges, and in the fields, and woods; it lies upon the hillside. He can see it red as gold, flashing with the splendid light of a million diamonds, if he will open his eyes. But the time is not yet.

The firm of publishers declined, but in courteous and even flattering terms, to publish the work in question. The author at once made up his mind that the book was not "in their line," and sent the MS. to another firm.

The second firm apparently declined the work; but in another month the author writes triumphantly that Messrs. —— are going to publish it. Now nothing remains but to settle the price.

"I cannot help," he says, "feeling this a moment of great triumph, after so much opposition from everyone. All my friends prophesied failure, and when I refused to desist from endeavouring, grew angry with me, and annoyed me as much as possible. . . . I will let you know as soon as we have agreed upon the price, and, of course, I shall have the

pleasure of sending you some copies when it appears."

Alas! he was mistaken. There was much more than the remuneration to be settled before the work was published; in fact, it never was published.

The last letter of the packet has no other date than May 7. From internal evidence, however, it must have been written in the year 1873.

"I have just had a great disappointment. After keeping the manuscript of my novel more than two months, Mr. —— has written to decline it. It really does seem like Sisyphus — just as one has rolled the stone close to the top of the hill, down it goes again, and all one's work has to be done over again. For some time after I began literary work I did not care in the least about a failure, because I had a perpetual spring of hope that the next would be more fortunate. But now, after eight years of almost continual failure, it is very hard indeed to make a fresh effort, because there is no hope to sustain

one's expectations. Still, although I have lost hope entirely, I am more than ever *determined* to succeed, and shall never cease trying till I do.

"It seems so singular to me that, although publishers constantly decline my works, yet if by any chance something that I have written gets into print, everybody immediately admires it, so that it does not seem that there is any want of ability. You remember those letters in the *Times?* They were declined by one editor of a much less important paper. The moment they were published everyone admired them, and even the most adverse critics allowed that the style and literary execution was good. I could show you a dozen clippings from adverse newspapers to that effect. This is the reflection that supports me under so many disappointments, because it seems to say that it is through no fault of mine. Thinking over this very deeply lately, and passing over in review the facts and experience I have obtained during the last eight years, I have come to the conclusion that it is no use for me to

waste further time in waiting for the decisions of publishers, but that I ought to set to work and publish on my own account. What, then, shall I publish? A novel costs some £60 or £80 at least. This I cannot possibly afford; I have no friends who can afford it. I can borrow, it is true, but that seems like putting a noose round your own neck for some one else to hang you with. But then many authors have made a name and even large sums of money by publishing very small books. . . ."

He goes on to show in his sanguine way how a little book is bound to bring in a great profit.

He then adds:

". . . Having tried, therefore, every other plan for succeeding, I have at last determined to try this. Do you not think I am right? It is only risking a few pounds—not like £60 or £80. The first little book I have selected to issue is a compendium of reporting experience for the use of learners. It is almost finished—all but binding—and the first copy

issued you shall see. It will be published by J. Snow and Co., 2, Ivy Lane.

"Then with regard to Swindon. I have so enlarged my account of it, and so enlarged the account of the Goddard family, that I have determined to publish the work in two parts. First to issue the Goddard part, by which means I shall not risk so much money, and shall see how the thing takes. Besides, I know that the Goddards would prefer it done in that way. I estimate the cost of the first part at about £10; and as the manuscript has been completed and lying idle for nearly three months, I should like to get it out at once, but I do not like to give the order until I have the cash to meet the bill.

"You have no idea of the wretched feeling produced by incessant disappointment, and the long, long months of weary waiting for decisions without the least hope. . . ."

CHAPTER IV.

GLEAMS OF LIGHT.

With the year 1871 the early struggles of the young writer came to an end. He had now secured his position, such as it was, on the local press As there are no further suggestions of parental opposition, we may suppose that this had now ceased. Parental opposition generally gives way when the lad shows that by following his own path he can maintain himself. This Richard could now do. He continued, however, to live at Coate, partly, no doubt, for economy, and partly for convenience. His old friends point out the short cut across the fields by which he was accustomed to walk from Coate to the office of the paper. Local enthusiasm, however, is proverbially feeble in the case of the native prophet.

This grows up in the after-years. The income which a young reporter on a small country paper can make is very modest, and the position is not one which commands the highest respect. Yet many young fellows are satisfied and happy in such a position, because, though they are still at the bottom of the ladder, their foot is planted on the rung, and their hands are on the sides. Being rich, therefore, in hope, he took the step which naturally follows success—he became engaged. His *fiancée* was a daughter of the late Mr. Andrew Baden, at that time occupying Dayhouse Farm, adjacent to Coate. For the present there could be no thought of marrying, but they would wait till their hopes were partly realized, and the golden shower should begin. Now there were two instead of one looking for the splendid triumph of the future. A first instalment of success came the following year, in November, 1872—a real, indisputable success—a thing that brought money and more work, and yet more work; a thing which, in the hands of a practical man, would have brought work enough to last a lifetime.

To Jefferies it was better than this, because it presently led him—the wanderer in the labyrinth of fruitless effort—to the line in which he was to make his reputation, and to find his true success. Is there anything in the world more truly delightful than the first success in the career you have chosen and ardently desire to adorn? If one desires to become an authority on any subject, to read your own paper in a great magazine; if one desires to become a journalist, to have the columns of a great paper opened to you; if one wishes to be a great novelist, to read the reviews of your first work, and to be assured that you are on the right track—nothing in the world surely can equal that blissful moment.

It came to this pair, thus waiting and hoping, in November, 1872, in this wise:

In the autumn of that year, the mind of the nation was beginning to be exercised with the subject of the relations of the farmer with the agricultural labourer. Richard Jefferies, inspired, if any man ever was, with the thought that he knew all about the subject, sat down

and wrote a long letter about "The Wiltshire Labourer." This letter he sent first to a certain London editor (name of the paper not stated), who refused it. He then sent it to the editor of the *Times*, who not only accepted it and printed it, but had a leader written upon it. Nor was this all. The letter called forth many answers; to these Jefferies replied in two more letters. The subject was noticed in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, in the *Spectator*, and in other journals. We are not here concerned with the results of the case—Jefferies wrote on the side of the tenant farmer. It is sufficient to note the fact of the letters and their immediate result—namely, that Jefferies sprang at one bound into the position of an authority on things agricultural. He dated the letters from Coate Farm, Swindon; so that he probably appeared to the editor and to the general public as a farmer, rather than as a newspaper reporter. To the whole of his after-life these letters were most important. They denoted, though as yet he knew it not, an entirely new departure. He was to experience many a bitter disappointment over novels

which he ought never to have written. There were plenty of snubs and rubs in store for him, as there are for every literary man at every stage of his career. Snubs and rubs are part of a profession which has an advantage quite peculiar to itself, that everything a man does is publicly commented upon by his brother professors writing anonymously. It is as if a clergyman's sermons should be publicly and every week handled by brother clergymen, or a doctor's cases by brothers of the calling; or as if a barrister's speeches should be anonymously criticised by other barristers. A man cannot make an ass of himself in the profession, and expect that nobody will notice it. Not at all; the greater the mess he makes, the more he will hear of it. Now Jefferies—poor man—was going to make a big mess of two or three jobs before he really found himself.

To be an authority on things agricultural is to speak on behalf of what was then, and is still, the most important interest of the whole country; to speak of agricultural labourers and of tenant farmers is to speak of the best

blood of the country, the hope and stay of Great Britain. Here was opened a chance such as comes to few. If it had been properly followed up, if it had fallen to a practical man, there would have been perceived here an open door leading to an honourable career, a safe line, with a sufficient income. I mean that any of our great newspapers would have been glad to number on its staff, and to retain, one who could write with knowledge on things agricultural. Always, throughout the whole of his life, Richard Jefferies wanted someone to advise him, but never so much as at this moment. He had this splendid chance, and he threw it away, not deliberately, but from ignorance and want of aptitude in business.

Yet the letters mark a new departure, for they made him write about the country. Success was before him at last, though not in the way he hoped.

The first letter to the *Times* was, for a young man of twenty-four, a most remarkable production. It was crammed with facts and information. In point of style it was clear and strong, without any faults of fine writing.

It would be taken—I have no doubt at all that the editor so received it—as the letter of a clear-headed, well-informed, middle-aged Wiltshire farmer. He writes at full length, covering two columns and a quarter of the *Times*, in small print. The letter itself is so curious, as giving an account of a condition of things which has already greatly changed in the sixteen years since it was written, that I have placed it for preservation in an appendix to this volume. The leader on the subject in the *Times* of the same day thus sums up the case:

"When so much is done for labourers by an improved class of landlords and tenants, and when it is evident that they cannot but share the general advance of wages, what is it that remains to be done? There can be no doubt about it, and we commend it to the attention of the talkative gentlemen who are making fine speeches and backing up the labourer to a stand-up fight with his employer. It is the labourer himself who wants improvement. He will do every-

thing for himself so very badly. He will not show common-sense in his cottage—if it is his own choice—or his clothing, or his food, or in his general arrangements. He will insist on poisoning the air of his cottage, his well, or the stream that runs past his door. He will not bestow half an hour on some needful repair which he thinks a landlord ought to do for him. He goes to the worst market for his provisions, buying everything on credit and in the smallest quantities. He allows a waste that would not be tolerated in wealthier households. He will not second with home discipline the efforts made to instruct his children at the school. He will still permit it to be almost impossible that his children shall be taught in the same room or play in the same ground with the children of his employer. In a word, he will not do his part—no easy one, it is true, yet not impossible. He escapes from thought, effort, and responsibility at the village 'public,' and lets his household go its way. Of course, he is only doing what many of his betters are doing in his own class and

condition. But there is the same to be said of all. If men are to rise, it must be done by themselves, for the whole world will never raise, or better appreciably, those who will not raise themselves."

You have already seen the letter written in May, 1873, in which he speaks despairingly of his efforts and his ill-success; in fact, he allowed a whole year to elapse without following up the advantage and experience acquired by these letters. It seems incredible. Meanwhile he was muddling his time, and perhaps his money, in bringing out things from which neither money nor honour could be expected. The first of these was the little book I have already noticed, on reporting and journalism. It would be curious to learn the pecuniary result of this volume.

The next volume was a "Family History of the Goddards of North Wilts." Now, if the Goddards were anxious to have their history written, they might have paid for it. Perhaps they did pay for the work, but I find no record of their doing so. Perhaps they thought that

Swindon would rally round the Goddard flag, and eagerly buy the book. I have not read the work; but it had the honour of getting a notice from the *Athenæum*, which the author heroically cut out and preserved. The plain truth was spoken in that notice, and the most was made of a very unfortunate mistake of a place, a date, and a poet, concerning which the curious may consult the *Athenæum* for the year 1873.

The results of publishing at his own expense were, we suppose, so satisfactory that Jefferies in 1874 brought out his first novel—"The Scarlet Shawl"—on that delightful method. It is always in vain that one assures a young writer that works which publishers with one consent refuse must be commercially worthless; it is always in vain that one preaches, exhorts, and implores the inexperienced not to throw away their money in the vain hope of getting it back with profit of gold and glory. They will do it. There are always publishing houses of a kind which are ready to print young writers' crude and foolish works at their own risk, and to talk vaguely before-

hand of enormous profits to be shared. Poor wretches! they never get any profits. Nobody ever buys any copies. There is never for the unfortunate writer any gold or any glory, but only sure, certain, and bitter disappointment.

As yet, Jefferies still clung to his old ideas, and had learned none of the lessons which the *Times* letters should have taught him. Therefore he brought out three novels in succession (see Chapter VI.), never getting any single advantage or profit out of them except the pain of shattered hopes, the loss of money, and the most contemptuous notices in the reviews.

We are in the year 1874. Apparently, Jefferies has had his chance, and has thrown it away. He is six-and-twenty years of age —it is youth, but this young man has only twelve more years of life, and none of his work has yet been done. Why—why did no one tear him away from his vain and futile efforts? See, he toils day after day, with an energy which nothing can repress—a resolution to succeed which sustains him through all his disappointments. He covers acres of paper,

and all to no purpose; for no one has told him the simplest law of all—that Art is imitation. One must not close the shutters, light the lamp, and then paint a flower one has never seen, as the painter thinks it ought to have been. Yet this is what Jefferies was doing. The young country lad, who knew no other society than that of the farm and the country town, was wasting and spoiling his life in writing about people and things whom he imagined. He was painting the flower he had never seen as he thought it ought to be.

Well, the great success of the *Times* letters seemed to have led to nothing. Yet it gave him a better position in his native place. His work was now so assured, and his income so much improved—though still slender enough—that in July, 1874, after a three years' engagement, he was married.

For the first six months of their marriage the young pair lived on at Coate. They then removed to a small house in Victoria Street, Swindon, where their first child was born. It is a happy thing to think that it was in the

first year of his wedded life that Jefferies brushed away the cobwebs from his brain, left the old things behind him for ever, and stepped out upon the greensward, the hill-side, the forest, and the meadows, where he was to walk henceforth until the end. It was time, indeed, to throw away his novels of society, to put away the unreal rubbish, to forget the foolish dreams, to let the puppets who could never have lived lie dust-covered in the limbo of false and conventional novels. Where is it, that limbo? Welcome, long-desired flowers of May! Welcome, fragrant breath of the breezy down!

CHAPTER V.

FIRST YEARS OF SUCCESS.

JEFFERIES made his way to the fields through the farmers first and the labourers next.

He wrote a paper for *Fraser's Magazine* (December, 1873) on the "Future of Farming," which attracted a considerable amount of attention. The *Spectator* had an article upon it. The paper is full of bold speculations and prophecies; as, for instance:

"We may, then, look to a time when farming will become a commercial speculation, and will be carried on by large joint-stock concerns, issuing shares of ten, fifteen, or fifty pounds each, and occupying from three to ten thousand acres. Such companies would, perhaps, purchase the entire sewage of an adjacent town. Their buildings, their streets of cattle-stalls,

would be placed on a slope sheltered from the north-east, but near the highest spot on the estate, so as to distribute manure and water from their reservoirs by the power of gravitation. A stationary steam-engine would crush their cake, and pulp their roots, pump their water, perhaps even shear their sheep. They would employ butchers and others, a whole staff, to kill and cut up bullocks in pieces suitable for the London market, transmitting their meat straight to the salesman, without the intervention of the dealer. That salesman would himself be entirely in the employ of the company, and sell no other meat but what they supplied him with. This would at once give a larger profit to the producer, and a lower price (in comparison) to the public. In summer, meat might be cooled by the ice-house, or refrigerator, which must necessarily be attached to the company's bacon factory. Except in particular districts, it is hardly probable that the dairy would be united with the stock-farm ; but if so, the ice-house would again come into requisition, and there would be a condensed-milk factory on the premises."

This was going back to the right line. He seems, however, to have done no more in this line until August of the next year (the month after his marriage), when he returned in earnest to the rural life, and never afterwards left it. His earliest and fastest friend was *Fraser's Magazine*, now, alas! defunct. But he was speedily engaged to write for other papers and magazines. His real literary life, in fact, may be said to begin at this period. The "Farmer at Home" was the title of this paper singled out by the *Spectator* as the best of all the papers for the month. Here there occurs a really striking passage on the "Farmer's Creed." They live, says the writer, amid conditions so unchanging that they have acquired a creed of their own, which they rarely express, never discuss, and never fail to act upon.

". . . In no other profession do the sons and the daughters remain so long, and so naturally, under the parental roof. The growth of half a dozen strong sons was a matter of self-congratulation, for each as he came to man's

estate took the place of a labourer, and so reduced the money expenditure. The daughters worked in the dairy, and did not hesitate to milk occasionally, or, at least, to labour in the hay-field. They spun, too, the home-made stuffs in which all the family were clothed. A man's children were his servants. They could not stir a step without his permission. Obedience and reverence to the parent was the first and greatest of all virtues. Its influence was to extend through life, and through the whole social system. They were to choose the wife or the husband approved of at home. At thirty, perhaps, the more fortunate of the sons were placed on farms of their own nominally, but still really under the father's control. They dared not plough or sow except in the way that he approved. Their expenditure was strictly regulated by his orders. This lasted till his death, which might not take place for another twenty years. At the present moment I could point out ten or twelve such cases, where men of thirty or forty are in farms, and to all appearance perfectly free and independent, and yet as com-

pletely under the parental thumb as they were at ten years old. . . . These men, if they think thus of their own offspring, cannot be expected to be more tender towards the lower class around them. They did at one time, and some still wish to, extend the same system to the labouring population. . . . They did not want only to indulge in tyranny; what they did was to rule the labouring poor in the same way as they did their own children—nothing more nor less. These labouring men, like his own children, must do as the farmer thought best. They must live here or there, marry so and so, or forfeit favour—in short, obey the parental head. Each farmer was king in his own domain; the united farmers of a parish were kings of the whole place. They did not use the power circumstances gave them harshly, but they paid very little regard to the liberty of the subject. . . . In religion it is, or lately was, the same. It was not a matter with the farmer of the Athanasian Creed, or the doctrine of salvation by faith, or any other theological dogma To him the parish church was the centre of the social

system of the parish. It was the keystone of that parental plan of government that he believed in. The very first doctrine preached from the pulpit was that of obedience. 'Honour thy father and thy mother' was inculcated there every seventh day. His father went to church, he went to church himself, and everybody else ought to go. It was as much a social gathering as the dinner at the market ordinary, or the annual audit dinner of their common landlord. The Dissenter, who declined to pay Church-rates, was an unsocial person. He had left the circle. It was not the theology that they cared about, it was the social nonconformity. In a spiritual sense, too, the clergyman was the father of the parish, the shepherd of the flock—it was a part of the great system. To go a step farther, in political affairs the one leading idea still threaded itself through all. The proper Parliamentary representative — the natural law-giver—was the landlord of the district. He was born amongst them, walked about amongst them, had been in their houses many a time. He knew their wants, their

ideas, their views. His own interest was identical with theirs. Therefore he was the man."

A third paper, called "John Smith's Shanty," gave a picture of the agricultural labourer's life. He here began, timidly at first, to leave the regions of hard actual fact, and to venture upon the higher flights of poetic and ideal work, but poetry based upon the actual facts. Yet not to leave altogether the journalistic methods. Thus, he wrote for *Fraser* a paper on "The Works at Swindon," which was simply a newspaper descriptive article, and one on "Allotment Gardens" for the *New Quarterly Review*. This was like his "Future of Farming" —a wholly practical paper. One of the new principles, he says, that is now gradually entering the minds of the masses, is a belief that each individual has a right to a certain share in the land of his birth. That was written twelve years ago. Since that time this belief has extended far and wide. There are now books and papers which openly advocate the doctrine that the land is the property of the people. It

is no longer a question which is asked, an answer which has to be whispered on account of its great temerity: it is a doctrine openly held and openly taught. But Jefferies was the first to find it out. He heard the whisper in the cottage and in the village ale-house; the reeds beside the brook whispered it to him. If, he thinks, every labouring man had his allotment, he would cease to desire the general division of the land.

"If it is possible to find ground near enough to the residence of the population to be practically useful as cemeteries, there can be no valid reason why spaces should not be available for a system of gardens. Numerous companies have been formed for the purpose of supplying the workmen with houses; the building societies and their estates are situated outside the city, but within easy reach by rail. Why should not societies exist and flourish for the equally useful object of providing the workman with a garden? If the plan of universal division of land were thoroughly carried out, it follows that the cities would disappear,

since, to obtain a bare living out of the four acres, a man must live on or very near to it, and spend his whole time in attending to it. But the extent of allotment-ground which such a society as this would provide for the workman must not be so large as to require any more attention than he could pay to it in the evening, or the Saturday afternoon, or at most in a day or so of absence from his work. He would have, of course, to go to his allotment by rail, and rail costs money. But how many thousands of workmen at this very hour go to their work day by day by rail, and return home at night; and the sum of money they thus expend must collectively be something enormous in the course of a year! To work his allotment he would have no necessity to visit it every day, or hardly every week. Such an allotment-ground must be under the direction of a proper staff of officers, for the distribution of lots, the collection of rent, the prevention of theft, and generally to maintain the necessary order. Looked at in this light, the extension of the allotment system to large towns does not hold out any very great diffi-

culties. The political advantage which would accrue would be considerable, as a large section of the population would feel that one at least of their not altogether frivolous complaints was removed. As a pecuniary speculation, it is possible that such a society would pay as well as a building society; for the preliminary expenses would be so small in comparison. A building society has to erect blocks of houses before it can obtain any return; but merely to plough, and lay out a few fields in regular plots, and number them on a plan, is a light task. If the rent was not paid, the society could always seize the crops; and if the plot was not cultivated in a given time, they might have a rule by which the title to it should be vacated. To carry the idea further, a small additional payment per annum might make the plot the tenant's own property. This would probably act as a very powerful inducement."

In the year 1874 he meditates a great work, which he began but never finished, using up his notes in after-years for what is really the

same subject treated with more literary finish and style than he had as yet acquired. He proposes (May 20th) to Messrs. Longmans to write a great book in two volumes on the whole Land Question. The first volume he proposes to call "Tenant and Labourer;" the second, "Land and Landlord." He will deal, he says, with the subject in an "impartial and trenchant" manner, but still "with a slightly conservative tone, so as to counsel moderation." On June 8th he sends an instalment of two hundred manuscript folios, proposing that the first volume shall be called "The Agricultural Life." The chapters are to be as follows :

I. The Creed of the Agriculturist.
II. The Agriculturist at Home.
III. Agriculture as a Business.
IV. Summary of the Farmer's Case.
V. The Labourer's Daily Life.
VI. The Labourer's Case.
VII. The Gist of the Whole Matter.

This proposal never came to anything; but the subject-matter was abundantly treated by Jefferies later on. Most of the chapters will

be found in "Hodge and his Masters." So far, he is still, it will be observed, the practical man. Whatever feeling he has for the poetry of Nature, he has as yet found little expression of it. He next wrote a paper on "Field-faring Women" for *Fraser*. He also wrote a most delightful article for the *Graphic* on the same subject, in which the truth is told about these women. This was the very first paper written in his later and better style :

"Those who labour in the fields require no calendar, no carefully-compiled book of reference to tell them when to sow and when to reap, to warn them of the flight of time. The flowers, blooming and fading, mark the months with unfailing regularity. When the sweet violet may be found in warm sheltered nooks, and the sleepy snake first crawls out from under the brown leaves, then it is time to gather the couch or roots after the plough, and to hoe the young turnips and swedes. This is the first work of the year for the agricultural women. It is not a pleasant work. Everyone who has walked over a ploughed

field remembers how the boots were clogged with the adhesive clay, and how the continuous ridges and furrows impeded progress. These women have to stoop and gather up the white couch-roots, and the other weeds, and place them in heaps to be burnt. The spring is not always soft and balmy. There comes one lovely day, when the bright sunlight encourages the buds and peeping leaves to push out, and then follows a week or more of the harsh biting east wind. The arable field is generally devoid of hedges or trees to break the force of the weather, and the couch-pickers have to withstand its cutting rush in the open. . . .

"The cold clods of earth numb the fingers as they search for the roots and weeds. The damp clay chills the feet through thick-nailed boots, and the back grows stiff with stooping. If the poor woman suffers from the rheumatism so common among the labouring class, such a day as this will make every bone in her body ache. When at last four o'clock comes, she has to walk a mile or two miles to her cottage and prepare her husband's supper. In hilly

districts, where sheep are the staple production, it follows, of course, that turnips and swedes, as their food, are the most important crop. Upon the unenclosed open downs the cold of early spring is intense, and the women who are engaged in hoeing feel it bitterly. Down in the rich fertile valleys, in the meadows, women are at work picking up the stones out of the way of the scythe, or beating clots about with a short prong. All these are wretched tasks, especially the last, and the remuneration for exposure and handling dirt very small. But now 'green grow the rushes,' and the cuckoo-flower thrusts its pale petals up among the rising grass. Till that grass reaches maturity, the women in meadow districts can find no field employment. The woods are now carpeted with acres upon acres of the wild hyacinth, or blue-bell, and far surpass in loveliness the most cultivated garden. The sheen of the rich deep blue shows like a lake of colour, in which the tall ash poles stand, and in the sunset each bell is tinged with purple. The nightingale sings in the hazel-copse, or on the hawthorn bough, both

day and night, and higher up, upon the downs, the skies are full of larks carolling at 'Heaven's gate.' But the poor woman hears them not. She has no memories of poetry; her mind can call up no beautiful thoughts to associate with the flower or the bird. She can sign her name in a scrawling hand, and she can spell through simple print, but to all intents and purposes she is completely ignorant. Therefore, she cannot see, that is, appreciate or feel, the beauty with which she is surrounded. Yet, despite the harsh, rude life she leads, there works up to the surface some little instinctive yearning after a higher condition. The yellow flowers in the cottage-garden—why is it that cottagers are so fond of yellow?—the gilly-flower, the single stock, marigolds, and such old-fashioned favourites, show a desire for ornament; still more so the occasional geranium in the window, specially tended by the wife."

Later on he returns to the subject, and relates the story of Dolly most mournful, most tragic, full of tears and pity.

He now began to alternate his practical

and his poetical papers. For the *Mark Lane Express* he wrote on "Village Organization"; for the *Standard* on "The Cost of Agricultural Labour"; for the *Fortnightly* on the "Power of the Farmer." Between these papers he wrote on "Marlborough Forest," on "Village Churches," and on the "Average of Beauty."

The first of these three articles already reached almost the highest level of his better style. Even for those who have never wandered in this great and wonderful forest, the paper is wholly charming, while to those who know the place, it is full of memories and regrets that one has seen so little of all that this man saw.

"The great painter Autumn has just touched with the tip of his brush a branch of the beech-tree, here and there leaving an orange spot, and the green acorns are tinged with a faint yellow. The hedges, perfect mines of beauty, look almost red from a distance, so innumerable are the peggles. Let not the modern Goths destroy our hedges, so typical of an English landscape, so full of all that can delight the eye and please the mind. Spare them

if only for the sake of the 'days when we went gipsying—a long time ago'—spare them for the children to gather the flowers of May and the blackberries of September. When the orange spot glows upon the beech, then the nuts are ripe, and the hawthorn-bushes are hung with festoons of the buff-coloured, heart-shaped leaves of a once-green creeper. That 'deepe and enclosed country of Northe Wiltes,' which old Clarendon, in his famous 'Civill Warre,' says the troops of King Charles had so much difficulty to hurry through, is pleasant to those who can linger by the wayside and the copse, and do not fear to hear the ordnance make the 'woods ring again,' though to this day a rusty old cannon-ball may sometimes be found under the dead brown leaves of Aldbourne Chase where the skirmish took place before 'Newbury Battle.' Perhaps it is because no such deadly outbursts of human passions have swept along beneath its trees that the 'Forest' is unsung by the poet, and unvisited by the artist. Yet its very name is poetical, Savernake, *i.e.*, savernesacre—like the God's acre of Longfellow. Saverne—a

peculiar species of sweet fern; acre—land. So we may call it Fern-land Forest, and with truth, for but one step beneath those beeches away from the path plunges us to our shoulders in an ocean of bracken. The yellow stalks, stout and strong as wood, make walking through the brake difficult, and the route pursued devious, till from the constant turning and twisting the way is lost. For this is no narrow copse, but a veritable forest in which it is easy to lose one's self; and the stranger who attempts to pass it away from the beaten track must possess some of the Indian instinct which sees signs and directions in the sun and wind, in the trees and humble plants of the ground. And this is its great charm. The heart has a yearning for the unknown, a longing to penetrate the deep shadow and the winding glade, where, as it seems, no human foot has been. High over head in the beech-tree the squirrel peeps down from behind a bough—his long bushy tail curled up over his back, and his bright eyes full of mischievous cunning. Listen, and you will hear the tap, tap of the woodpecker, and

see, away he goes in undulating flight with a wild, unearthly chuckle, his green and gold plumage glancing in the sun, like the parrots of far-distant lands. He will alight in some open space upon an ant-hill, and lick up the red insects with his tongue. In the fir-tree, there, what a chattering and fluttering of gaily-painted wings—three or four jays are quarrelling noisily. These beautiful birds are slain by scores because of their hawk-like capacities for destruction of game, and because of the delicate colours of their feathers, which are used in fly-fishing. There darts across the glade a scared rabbit, straining each little limb for speed, almost rushing against us, a greater terror overcoming the less. In a moment there darts forth from the dried grass a fierce red-furred hunter, a very tiger to the rabbit tribe, with back slightly arched, bounding along, and sniffing the scent. Another, and another, still a fourth—a whole pack of stoats (elder brothers of the smaller weasels). In vain will the rabbit trust to his speed, these untiring wolves will overtake him. In vain will he turn and double, their unerring noses

will find him out. In vain the tunnels of the 'bury,' they will come as surely under ground as above. At last, wearied, panting, frightened almost to death, the timid creature will hide in a *cul-de-sac*, a hole that has no outlet, burying its head in the sand. Then the tiny blood-hounds will steal with swift, noiseless rush, and fasten upon the veins of the neck. What a rattling the wings of the pigeons make as they rise out of the trees in hot haste and alarm! As we pass a fir-copse, we stoop down and look along the ground under the foliage. The sharp 'needles,' or leaves, which fall will not decay, and they kill all vegetation, so that there is no underwood or herbage to obstruct the view. It is like looking into a vast cellar supported upon innumerable slender columns. The pheasants run swiftly away underneath. High up the cones are ripening —those mysterious emblems sculptured in the hands of the gods at Nineveh, perhaps typifying the secret of life. More bracken. What a strong, tall fern! it is like a miniature tree. So thick is the cover, a thousand archers might lie hid in it easily. In this wild solitude,

utterly separated from civilization, the whistle of an arrow would not surprise us—the shout of a savage before he hurled his spear would seem natural, and in keeping. What are those strange clattering noises, like the sound of men fighting with wooden 'back-swords'? Now it is near—now far off—a spreading battle seems to be raging all round, but the combatants are out of sight. But, gently—step lightly, and avoid placing the foot on dead sticks, which break with a loud crack—softly peep round the trunk of this noble oak, whose hard furrowed bark defends it like armour. The red deer! Two splendid stags are fighting, fighting for their lady-love, the timid doe. They rush at each other with head down and horns extended—the horns meet and rattle—they fence with them skilfully. This was the cause of the noise. It is the tilting season—these tournaments between the knights of the forest are going on all around. There is just a trifle of danger in approaching these combatants, but not much, just enough to make the forest still more enticing; none whatever to those who use common caution.

At the noise of our footsteps away go the stags, their 'branching antlers' seen high above the tall fern, bounding over the ground in a series of jumps, all four feet leaving the earth at once. There are immense oaks that we come to now, each with an open space beneath it where Titania and the fairies may dance their rings at night. These enormous trunks—what *time* they represent! To us each hour is of consequence, especially in this modern day which has invented the detestable creed that time is money. But time is not money to Nature. She never hastens. Slowly from the tiny acorn grew up this gigantic trunk, and spread abroad those limbs which in themselves are trees. And from the trunk itself, to the smallest leaf, every infinitesimal atom of which it is composed was perfected slowly, gradually—there was no hurry, no attempt to discount effect. A little farther, and the ground declines; through the tall fern we come upon a valley. But the soft warm sunshine, the stillness, the solitude have induced an irresistible idleness. Let us lie down upon the fern, on the edge of the green

vale, and gaze up at the slow clouds as they drift across the blue vault. The subtle influence of nature penetrates every limb and every vein, fills the soul with a perfect contentment, an absence of all wish except to lie there half in sunshine, half in shade for ever, in a Nirvana of indifference to all but the exquisite delight of simply *living*. The wind in the tree-tops overhead sighs in soft music, and ever and anon a leaf falls with a slight rustle to mark the time. The clouds go by in rhythmic motion, the ferns whisper verses in the ear, the beams of the wondrous sun pour in endless song, for he also

> "'In his motion like an angel sings,
> Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubim,
> Such harmony is in immortal souls!'

Time is to us now no more than it was to the oak; we have no consciousness of it. Only we feel the broad earth beneath us, and as to the ancient giant, so there passes through us a sense of strength renewing itself, of vital energy flowing into the frame. It may be an hour, it may be two hours, when without the aid of sound or sight we become aware by an

indescribable supersensuous perception that living creatures are approaching. Sit up without noise and look—there is a herd of deer feeding down the narrow valley close at hand within a stone's-throw. And these are deer indeed, no puny creatures, but the 'tall deer' that William the Conqueror loved 'as if he were their father.' Fawns are darting here and there, frisking round the does. How many may there be in this herd?—fifty, perhaps more; nor is this a single isolated instance, but dozens more of such herds may be found in this true old English forest, all running free and unconstrained. But the sun gets low. Following this broad green drive, it leads us past vistas of endless glades going no man knows where into shadow and gloom, past grand old oaks, past places where the edge of a veritable wilderness comes up to the trees—a wilderness of gnarled hawthorn trunks of unknown ages, of holly with shining metallic-green leaves, and hazel-bushes. Past tall trees bearing the edible chestnut in prickly clusters, past maples which in a little while will be painted in crimson and gold, with the deer

peeping out of the fern everywhere, and once perhaps catching a glimpse of a shy, beautiful milk-white doe. . . . Still onward, into a gravel carriage-road now, returning by degrees to civilization, and here with happy judgment the hand of man has aided nature. Far as the eye can see extends an avenue of beech, passing right through the forest. The tall smooth trunks rise up to a great height, and then branch overhead, looking like the roof of a Gothic cathedral. The growth is so regular and so perfect that the comparison springs unbidden to the lip, and here, if anywhere, that order of architecture might have taken its inspiration. There is a continuous Gothic arch of green for miles, beneath which one may drive or walk as in the aisles of a forest-abbey. But it is impossible to even mention all the beauties of this place within so short a space. It must suffice to say that the visitor may walk for whole days in this great wood, and never pass the same spot twice. No gates or jealous walls will bar his progress. As the fancy seizes him so he may wander. If he has a taste for archæological studies, especially the pre-

historic, the edge of the forest melts away upon downs that bear grander specimens than can be seen elsewhere—Stonehenge and Avebury are near. The trout-fisher can approach very close to it. The rail gives easy communication, but has not spoilt the seclusion. Monsieur Lesseps, of Suez Canal fame, is reported to have said that Marlborough Forest was the finest he had seen in Europe. Certainly no one who had not seen it would believe that a forest still existed in the very heart of Southern England, so completely recalling those woods and 'chases' upon which the ancient feudal monarchs set such store."

In the paper called "Village Churches," Jefferies has wholly found himself at last. Everybody has felt the charm of the village church. The most careless pedestrian turns by instinct into the old churchyard, and hopes to find the church-door open. It is not the architecture that he cares to study, but the feeling of holy peace which lingers in the place, like the glory between the Cherubim. Let Jefferies interpret for us:

"The black rooks are busy in the old oak-trees carrying away the brown acorns one by one in their strong beaks to some open place where, undisturbed, they can feast upon the fruit. The nuts have fallen from the boughs, and the mice garner them out of the ditches; but the blue-black sloes cling tight to the thorn-branch still. The first frost has withered up the weak sap left in the leaves, and they whirl away in yellow clouds before the gusts of wind. It is the season, the hour of half-sorrowful, half-mystic thought, when the Past becomes a reality, and the Present a dream, and unbidden memories of sunny days and sunny faces, seen when life was all spring, float around:

> "'Dim dream-like forms! your shadowy train
> Around me gathers once again;
> The same as in life's morning hour,
> Before my troubled gaze you passed.
> * * * * *
> Forms known in happy days you bring,
> And much-loved shades amid you spring,
> Like a tradition, half-expired,
> Worn out with many a passing year.'

"In so busy a land as ours, there is no place where the mind can, as it were, turn in

upon itself so fully as in the silence and solitude of a village church. There is no ponderous vastness, no oppressive weight of gloomy roof, no weird cavernous crypts, as in the cathedral; only a *visible* silence, which at once isolates the soul, separates it from external present influences, and compels it, in falling back upon itself, to recognise its own depth and powers. In daily life we sit as in a vast library filled with tomes, hurriedly writing frivolous letters upon 'vexatious nothings,' snatching our food and slumber, for ever rushing forward with beating pulse, never able to turn our gaze away from the goal to examine the great storehouse—the library around us. Upon the infinitely delicate organization of the brain innumerable pictures are hourly painted; these, too, we hurry by, ignoring them, pushing them back into oblivion. But here, in silence, they pass again before the gaze. Let no man know for what real purpose we come here; tell the aged clerk our business is with brasses and inscriptions, press half-a-crown into his hand, and let him pass to his potato-digging. There is one

advantage, at least, in the closing of the church on week-days, so much complained of—to those who do visit it there is a certainty that their thoughts will not be disturbed. And the sense of man's presence has departed from the walls and oaken seats; the dust here is not the dust of the highway, of the quick footstep; it is the dust of the past. The ancient heavy key creaks in the cumbrous lock, and the iron latch-ring has worn a deep groove in the solid stone. The narrow nail-studded door of black oak yields slowly to the push—it is not easy to enter, not easy to quit the Present—but once close it, and the living world is gone. The very style of ornament upon the door—the broad-headed nails—has come down from the remotest antiquity. After the battle, says the rude bard in the Saxon chronicle,

> "'The Northmen departed
> In their nailed barks,'

and earlier still the treacherous troop that seized the sleeping magician in iron, Wayland the Smith, were clad in 'nailed armour,' in both instances meaning ornamented with nails.

Incidentally it may be noted that until very recently at least one village church in England had part of the skin of a Dane nailed to the door—a stern reminder of the days when 'the Pagans' harried the land. This narrow window, deep in the thick wall, has no painted magnificence to boast of, but as you sit beside it in the square high-sided pew, it possesses a human interest which even art cannot supply. The tall grass growing rank on the graves without rustles as it waves to and fro in the wind against the small diamond panes, yellow and green with age—rustles with a melancholy sound, for we know that this window was once far above the ground, but the earth has risen till nearly on a level; risen from the accumulation of human remains. Yet but a day or two before, on the Sunday morning, in this pew, bright restless children smiled at each other, exchanged guilty pushes, while the sunbeams from the arrow-slit above shone upon their golden hair. Let us not think of this further. But dimly through the window, 'as through a glass darkly,' see the green yew with its red berries, and afar the elms and

beeches, brown and yellow. The steep down rises over them, and the moving gray patch upon it is a flock of sheep. The white wall is cold and damp, and the beams of the roof overhead, though the varnish is gone from them, are dank with slow decay. In the recess lies the figure of a knight in armour, rudely carved, beside his lady, still more rudely rendered in her stiff robes, and of him an ill-spelt inscription proudly records that he 'builded ye greate howse at'—no matter where—but history records that cruel war wrapped it in flames before half a generation was gone. So that the boast of his building great houses reads as a bitter mockery. There stands opposite a grander monument to a mighty earl, and over it hangs a breastplate, and gauntlets of steel. The villagers will tell that in yonder deep shady 'combe' or valley, in the thick hazel-bushes, when the 'beetle with his drowsy hum' rises through the night air, there comes the wicked old earl wearing this very breastplate, these iron gloves, to expiate one evil deed of yore. And if we sit in this pew long enough, till the mind is

magnetized with the spirit of the past, till the early evening sends its shadowy troops to fill the distant corners of the silent church, then perhaps there may come to us forms gliding noiselessly over the stone pavement of the aisles—forms not repelling or ghastly, but filling us with an eager curiosity. Then through the slit made for that very purpose centuries since, when the pew was in a family chapel, through the slit in the pillar, we may see cowled monks assemble at the altar, muttering as magicians might over vessels of gold. The clank of scabbards upon the stones is stilled, the rustle of gowns is silent; if there is a sound it is of subdued sobs, as the aged monk blesses the troop on the eve of their march. Not even yet has the stern idol of war ceased to demand its victims; even yet brave hearts and noble minds must perish, and leave sterile the hopes of the elders and the love of woman. There is still light enough left to read the few simple lines on the plain marble slab, telling how 'Lieutenant ——,' at Inkerman, at Lucknow, or later still, at Coomassie, fell doing his duty. And these

plain slabs are dearer to us far than all the sculptured grandeur, all the titles and pomp of belted earl and knight; their simple words go straighter to our hearts than all the quaint curt Latin of the olden time. The belfry-door is ajar—these winding-stairs are not easy of access. The edges are worn away, and the steps strewn with small sticks of wood; sticks once used by the jackdaws in building their nests in the tower. It is needful to take much care, lest the foot should stumble in the semi-darkness. Listen! there is now a slight sound; it is the dull ticking of the old, old clock above. It is the only thing with motion here; all else is still, and even its motion is not life. A strange old clock; a study in itself; all the works open and visible, simple, but ingenious. For a hundred years it has carried round the one hour-hand upon the square-faced dial without, marking every second of time for a century with its pendulum. Here, too, are the bells, and one, the chief bell, is a noble tenor, a mighty maker of sound. Its curves are full and beautiful, its colour clear, its tone, if you do but tap it, sonorous, yet not harsh.

It is an artistic bell. Round the rim runs a rhyme in the monkish tongue, which has a chime in the words, recording the donor, and breathing a prayer for his soul. In the days when this bell was made men put their souls into their works; their one great object was not to turn out a hundred thousand all alike: it was rarely they made two alike. Their one great object was to construct a work which should carry their very spirit in it, which should excel all similar works, and cause men in after-times to inquire with wonder for the maker's name, whether it was such a common thing as a knife-handle, or a bell, or a ship. Longfellow has caught the spirit well in the Saga of the 'Long Serpent,' where the builder of the vessel listens to axe and hammer—

> "'All this tumult heard the master,
> It was music to his ear;
> Fancy whispered all the faster,
> "Men shall hear of Thorberg Skafting
> For a hundred year!"'

Would that there were more of this spirit in the workshops of our day! They did not, when such a work was finished, hasten to

blaze it abroad with trumpet and shouting; it was not carried to the topmost pinnacle of the mountain, in sight of all the kingdoms of the earth. They were contented with the result of their labour, and cared little where it was placed, or who saw it; and so it is that some of the finest-toned bells in the world are at this moment to be found in village churches, and for so local a fame the maker worked as truly, and in as careful a manner, as if he had known his bell was to be hung in St. Peter's at Rome. This was the true spirit of art. Yet it is not altogether pleasant to contemplate this bell; the mind cannot but reflect upon the length of time it has survived those to whose joys or sorrows it has lent a passing utterance, and who are now dust in the yard beneath.

> "'For full five hundred years I've swung
> In my old gray turret high,
> And many a changing theme I've sung
> As the time went stealing by.'

Even the 'old gray turret' shows more signs of age and of decay than the bell, for it is strengthened with iron clamps and rods to

bind its feeble walls together. Of the pavements, whose flag-stones are monuments, the dates and names worn by footsteps; of the vaults beneath, with their grim and ghastly traditions of coffins moved out of place, as was supposed, by supernatural agency, but, as explained, by water; of the thick walls in which, in at least one village church, the trembling victim of priestly cruelty was immured alive—of these, and a thousand other matters that suggest themselves, there is no time to speak. But just a word must be spared to notice one lovely spot where two village churches stand not a hundred yards apart, separated by a stream, both in the hands of one vicar, whose 'cure' is, nevertheless, so scant of souls, that service in the morning in one, and in the evening in the other church, is amply sufficient. And where is there a place where spring-time possesses such a tender yet melancholy interest to the heart, as in a village churchyard, where the budding leaves, and flowers in the grass, may naturally be taken as symbolical of a still more beautiful spring-time yet in store for the soul?"

CHAPTER VI.

FICTION, EARLY AND LATE.

THERE lies before me a roll containing certain newspaper extracts pasted on paper and sewed together. They are cuttings from the *North Wilts Herald*, and contain a romance, entitled "A Strange Story," written "expressly" for that paper, and signed "Geoffrey." That Geoffrey—let us reveal a long-buried secret—was none other than Richard Jefferies himself. The "Strange Story" was published on June 30, 1866. It is blood-curdling; it is, in fact, the work of a boy. Between July 21 and August 4 of the same year, a second tale appeared by the same author; it is called "Henrique Beaumont." There is a murder in it, and, of course, a murderer. Lightning—sign of Heaven's wrath—reveals that the

murderer's face, after the deed, is as pale as death. A third tale is called "Who Will Win? or, American Adventure." There is fighting in it, with negroes, hairbreadth escapes, and such things, in breathless succession. A fourth and last tale is called "Masked." These boyish efforts are only mentioned here to show in what direction the lad's thoughts were running. Considered as a lad's productions, they require no comment. At the outset, Jefferies proposed fiction to himself as the most desirable form of literature, and the most likely form with which to court success. Almost to the end he continued to keep this ambition before himself. The list of his serious attempts at fiction is respectable as regards number. It includes the following:

"The Scarlet Shawl," one vol., 1874.
"Restless Human Hearts," three vols., 1875.
"World's End," three vols., 1877.
"Green Fern Farm," three vols., 1880.
"The Dewy Morn," two vols., 1884.
"Amaryllis at the Fair," one vol., 1887.

To these may be added—but they must be

treated separately—"Wood Magic," a fable, 1881, and "Bevis," three vols., 1882. Perhaps "After London" may also be accounted a work of fiction.

"The Scarlet Shawl" was published in July, 1874, in one volume. As the work is stated on the title-page to have advanced to a second edition, one of two things is certain —namely, either the book appealed to a large number of readers, or the editions were very small indeed. I incline, myself, to the latter opinion.

Great as is the admiration of Jefferies' readers for his best and noblest work, it must be frankly confessed that, regarded as a story-teller, he is not successful. Why this is so we will presently inquire. As regards this, his earliest serious work of fiction, there is one remarkable fact, quite without precedent in the history of literature—it is that the book affords not the slightest indication of genius, insight, descriptive or dramatic power, or, indeed, of any power, especially of that kind with which he was destined to make his name.

It is a book which any publisher's reader, after glancing at the pages, would order to be returned instantly, without opinion given or explanation offered; it is a book which a young man of such real promise, with such a splendid career before him, ought somehow to have been prevented from publishing. Two reviews of it are preserved in a certain book of extracts—one from the *Athenæum*, and one from the *Graphic*. The story was also made a peg by a writer in the *Globe* for some unkind remarks about modern fiction generally. It is only mentioned here because we would not be accused of suppressing facts, and because there is no author who has not made similar false starts, mistakes, and attempts in lines unsuited to his genius. It is not much blame to Jefferies that his first novel was poor; it was his misfortune that no one told him at the outset that a book of which the author has to pay the expense of production is probably worthless. It is, perhaps, wonderful that the author could possibly think it good. There are, one imagines, limits even to an author's illusions as regards his own work. But it is

not so wonderful that Jefferies should at this time, when he was still quite young and ignorant of the world, write a worthless book, as that he should at any time at all write a book which had not the least touch of promise or of power.

Consider, however. What is the reason why a young author so often shows a complete inability to discover how bad his early work really is? It is that he is wholly unable to understand—no young writer can understand—the enormous difference between his powers of conception and imagination—which are often enormous—and those of execution. If it were worth while, I think it would be possible to extricate from the crude pages of "The Scarlet Shawl" the real novel which the writer actually had in his mind, and fondly thought to have transferred to the printed page. That novel would, I dare say, have been sweet and wholesome, pure and poetical. The thing which he submitted to the public was a work in which all these qualities were conspicuously wanting. The young poet reads his own verses, his mind full of splendid images,

half-formed characters, clouds of bewildering colours, and imagines that he has fixed these floating splendours in immortal verse. When he has forgotten what was in his mind while he was writing that verse, he will be able to understand how feeble are his rhymes, but not till then. I offer this as some explanation of these early novels.

Consider, again. He never was a novelist; he never could be one. To begin with, he knew nothing of society, nothing of men and women, except the people of a small country town. There are, truly, materials for dramatic fiction in plenty upon a farm and in a village; but Jefferies was not the man to perceive them and to use them. His strength lay elsewhere, and as yet he had not found his strength.

Another reason why he could never be a novelist was that he wholly lacked the dramatic faculty. He could draw splendid landscapes, but he could not connect them together by the thread of human interest. Nature in his books is always first, and humanity always second. Two figures are in the foreground, but one

hardly cares to look at them in contemplating the wonderful picture which surrounds them.

Again, he did not understand, so to speak, stage management. When he had got a lot of puppets in his hands, he could not make them act. And he was too self-contained to be a novelist; he could never get rid of his own personality. When he succeeds in making his reader realize a character, it is when that character is either himself, as in "Bevis," or a part of himself, as Farmer Iden in "Amaryllis." The story in his earlier attempts is always imitative, awkward, and conventional; it is never natural and never spontaneous. In his later books he lays aside all but the mere pretence of a story. The individual pictures which he presents are delightful and wonderful; they are like his short essays and articles —they may be read with enormous pleasure— but the story, what is the story? Where is it? There is none. There is only the promise of a story not worked out—left, not half untold, but hardly begun, as in "After London" and in "Amaryllis at the Fair." You may put down any of his so-called

novels at any time with no more regret than that this scene or that picture was not longer. As the writer never took any interest in his own characters — one understands that as clearly as if it was proclaimed upon the house-tops—so none of his readers can be expected to feel any interest. It is the old, old story. In any kind of art—it matters not what—if you wish your readers to weep, you must first be constrained to weep yourself. Many other reasons might be produced for showing that Jefferies could never have been a successful novelist; but these may suffice.

Meantime, the wonder remains. How could the same hand write the coarse and clumsy "Scarlet Shawl" which was shortly to give the world such sweet and delicate work, so truthful, so artistic, so full of fine feeling? How could that be possible? Indeed, one cannot altogether explain it. Collectors of Jefferies' books—unless they are mere collectors who want to have a complete set—will do well to omit the early novels. They belong to that class of book which quickly becomes scarce, but never becomes rare.

There are limitations in the work of every man. With such a man as Jefferies, the limitations were narrower than with most of those who make a mark in the history of literature. He was to succeed in one way—only in one way. Outside that way, failure, check, disappointment, even derision, awaited him. In the "Eulogy of Richard Jefferies" one can afford to confess these limitations. He is so richly endowed that one can well afford to confess them. It no more detracts from his worth and the quality of his work to own that he was no novelist than it would be to confess that he was no sculptor.

But the wonder of it! How *could* such a man write these works, being already five or six and twenty years of age, without revealing himself? It is as if one who was to become a great singer should make his first attempt and break down without even revealing the fact that he had a noble voice, as yet untrained. Or as if one destined to be a great painter should send in a picture for exhibition in which there was no drawing, or sense of colour, or grouping, or management of lights, or any

promise at all. The thing cannot be wholly explained. It is a phenomenon in literature.

It is best, I say, to acknowledge these limitations fully and frankly, so that we may go on with nothing, so to speak, to conceal. Let us grant all the objections to Jefferies as a story-teller that anyone may choose to make. In the ordinary sense of the word, Jefferies was not a novelist; in the artistic sense of the word, he was not a novelist. This fully understood and conceded, we can afterwards consider his later so-called novels as so many storehouses filled with priceless treasure.

I have in my hands certain letters which Jefferies addressed to Messrs. Tinsley Brothers on the subject of his MSS. They are curious, and rather saddening to read. They begin in the year 1872 with proposals that the firm should publish a work called "Only a Girl," "the leading idea of which is the delineation of a girl entirely unconventional, entirely unfettered by precedent, and in sentiment always true to herself." He writes a first letter on the subject in May. In September he reopens the subject.

"The scenery is a description of that found in this county, with every portion of which I have been familiar for many years. The characters are drawn from life, though so far disguised as to render too easy identification impossible. I have worked in many of the traditions of Wilts, endeavouring, in fact, in a humble manner to do for that county what Whyte Melville has done for Northampton and Miss Braddon for Yorkshire."

As nothing more is written on the subject of "Only a Girl," I suppose she was suppressed altogether, or worked up into another book.

In 1874 he attacks the same publishers with a new MS. This time it is "The Scarlet Shawl." It will be easily understood, from what has gone before, that he was asked to pay a sum of money in advance in order to cover the risk—in this case, to pay beforehand the certain loss. He objected to the amount proposed, and says with charming simplicity:

"I mean to become a name sooner or later. I shall stick to the first publisher who takes

me up; and, unless I am very much mistaken, we shall make money. To write a tale is to me as easy as to write a letter, and I do not see why I should not issue two a year for the next twelve or fifteen years. I can hardly see the possible loss from a novel."

This is really wonderful. This young man knows so little about the writing of novels as to suppose that, because it is easy for him to write two "Scarlet Shawls" a year, there can be no possible loss in them! You see that he had everything to learn. You may also observe that from the beginning he has never faltered in his one ambition. He will succeed; and he will succeed in literature.

Terms are finally agreed upon, and "The Scarlet Shawl" is produced. Some time afterwards he writes for a cheque, and receives an account, whether accompanied by a cheque or not does not appear. But he submits the account to a friend, who assures him that it is correct. Thus satisfied, he finishes a second story, this time in three volumes. It was called "Restless Human Hearts."

In the following year "Restless Human

Hearts," in three volumes, was brought out by the same firm. In the book of extracts, from which I have already drawn, there are four or five reviews preserved. They are all of the same opinion, and it is not a flattering opinion. The *Graphic* admitted that there was one scene drawn with considerable power. One need not dwell longer upon this work. Jefferies, in fact, was describing a society of which he knew absolutely nothing, and was drawing on his imagination for a picture which he tendered as one of contemporary manners. At this juncture—nay, at every point—of his literary career, he wanted someone to stand at his elbow and make him tear up everything—everything—that pretended to describe a society of which he knew nothing. The hero appears to have been a wicked nobleman. Heavens! what did this young provincial journalist know of wicked noblemen? But he had read about them, when he was a boy. He had read the sensational romances in which the nobleman was, at that time, always represented as desperately wicked. In these later days the nobleman of the penny

novelette is generally pictured as virtuous. Why and how this change of view has been brought about it is impossible in this place to inquire ; but Jefferies belonged to the generation of wicked dukes and vicious earls.

The terms upon which "Restless Human Hearts" was published do not appear from the letters extant. Jefferies writes, however, a most sensible letter on the subject. He refuses absolutely to pay any more for publishing his own books. He says:

"This is about the worst speculation into which I could possibly put the money. Therefore I am resolved to spend no more upon the matter, whether the novel gets published or not. The magazines pay well, and immediately after publication the cheque is forwarded. It seems the height of absurdity, after receiving a cheque for a magazine article, to go and pay a sum of money just to get your tale in print. I was content to do so the first time, because it is in accordance with the common rule of all trades to pay your footing." The resemblance is not complete, let me say, because the new author, on this theory, would not pay

his footing to other authors, but to a publisher, and, besides, such a proposal has never been made to any author. "I might just as well," he concludes, "put the cheque in the fire as print a tale at my own expense."

Quite so. Most sensibly put. Young authors will do well to lay this discovery to heart. They may be perfectly certain that a manuscript which respectable firms refuse to publish at their own risk and expense is not worth publishing at all, and they may just as well put their bank-notes upon the fire as pay them to a publisher for producing their works. Nay, much better, because they will thus save themselves an infinite amount of disappointment and humiliation.

Before "Restless Human Hearts" is well out of the binder's hands, he is ready—this indefatigable spinner of cobwebs—with another story. It is called "In Summer-Time." He is apparently oblivious of the brave words quoted above, and is now ready to advance £20 towards the risk of the new novel. Nothing came of the proposal, and "In Summer-Time" went to join "Only a Girl."

In the same year—this is really a most wonderful record of absolutely wasted energy—he has an allegory written in Bunyanesque English called "The New Pilgrim's Progress; or, A Christian's Painful Passage from the Town of Middle Class to the Golden City." This, too, sinks into oblivion, and is heard of no more.

Undeterred by all this ill-success, Jefferies proceeds to write yet another novel, called "World's End." He says that he has spent a whole winter upon it.

"The story centres round the great property at Birmingham, considered to be worth four millions, which is without an owner. A year or two ago there was a family council at that city of a hundred claimants from America, Australia, and other places, but it is still in Chancery. This is the core, or kernel, round which the plot develops itself. I think, upon perusal, you would find it a striking book, and full of original ideas."

In consideration of the failure of "Restless Human Hearts," he offers his publisher the whole of the first edition for nothing, which

seems fair, and one hopes that his publisher recouped by this first edition his previous losses. The reviewers were kinder to "World's End." The *Queen*, the *Graphic*, and the *Spectator* spoke of it with measured approbation, but no enthusiasm.

He writes again, offering a fourth novel, called "The Dewy Morn;" but as no more letters follow, it is probable that the work was refused. This looks as if the success of "World's End" was limited. "The Dewy Morn," in the later style, was published in 1884 by Messrs. Chapman and Hall.

The appearance of "World's End" marks the conclusion of one period of his life. Henceforth Jefferies abandons his ill-starred attempts to paint manners which he never saw, a society to which he never belonged, and the life of people concerning whom he knew nothing. He has at last made the discovery that this kind of work is absolutely futile. Yet he does not actually realize the fact until he has made many failures, and wasted a great deal of time, and is nearly thirty years of age. Henceforth his tales, if we are to call them tales, his papers, sketches, and

finished pictures, will be wholly rural. He has written "The Dewy Morn," and apparently the work has been refused; there was little in his previous attempts to tempt a publisher any farther. He will now write "Greene Ferne Farm," "Bevis," "After London," and "Amaryllis at the Fair." They are not novels at all, though he chooses to call them novels; they are a series of pictures, some of beauty and finish incomparable, strung together by some sort of thread of human interest which nobody cares to follow.

CHAPTER VII.

IN FULL CAREER.

NEVER, certainly, did any man have a better chance of success in literature than Jefferies about the year 1876. He had made himself, to begin with, an authority on the most interesting of all subjects ; he knew more about farming—that is to say, farming in his own part of the country—than any other man who could wield a pen ; he had written papers full of the most brilliant suggestions, as well as knowledge, as to the future of agriculture and its possible developments; he had written things which made people ask if there had truly arisen an agricultural prophet in the land. And he was as yet only twenty-eight. Of all young authors, he seems to have been the man most to be envied. Everything that he had so long

desired seemed now lying at his feet ready to be picked up. To use the old parlance, the trumpet of fame was already resounding in the heavens for him, and the crown of honour was already being woven for his brows.

Some men would have made of this splendid commencement a golden ladder of fortune. They would have come to town—the first step, whether one is to become a millionnaire or a Laureate; they would have joined clubs; they would have gone continually in and out among their fellow-men, and especially those of their own craft or mystery; they would have been seen as much as possible in society; they would have stood up to speak on platforms; they would have sought to be mentioned in the papers; they would have courted popularity in the ways very well known to all, and commonly practised without concealment. Such a man as Jefferies might have made himself, without much trouble, a great power in London.

Well, Jefferies did not become a power in London at all. He could not; everything was against him, except the main fact that the way

was open to him. First, the air of the town choked and suffocated him; he panted for the breath of the fields. Next, he had no knowledge or experience of men; he never belonged to society at all, not even to the quiet society of a London suburb; he had none of the conversation which belongs to clubs and to club life; he never associated with literary men or London journalists; he knew nobody. Thirdly, there was the reserve which clung round him like a cloak which cannot be removed. He did not want to know anybody; he was not only reserved, but he was self-contained. Therefore, the success which he achieved did not mean to him what it should have meant had he been a man of the world. On the other hand, it must be conceded that no mere man of the world could write the things which Jefferies subsequently wrote. Let us, therefore, content ourselves with the reflection that his success proved in the end to be of a far higher kind than a mere worldly success. This knowledge, if such things follow beyond the grave, should be enough to make him happy.

He was himself contented—he was even

happy—and desired nothing more than to go on finding a ready market for his wares, a sufficient income for the daily wants of his household, and that praise which means to authors far more than it means to any other class of men. Nobody praises the physician or the barrister : they go on their own way quite careless of the world's praise. But an author wants it ; I think that all authors need praise. To work day after day, year after year, without recognition, thanks, or appreciation, must in the end become destructive to the highest genius. Praise makes a man write better. Praise gives him that happy self-confidence which permits the flow, and helps the expression, of his thoughts. Praise gives him audacity, a most useful quality for an author. Jefferies could never have written his best things but for the praise which he received. The chief reason, I verily believe, why his work went on improving was that every year that he lived after the appearance of the " Gamekeeper at Home " he received an ever increasing share of praise, appreciation and encouragement.

It was somewhere about the year 1876 that I myself first fell upon some of his work. I remember the delight with which I drank, as a bright and refreshing draught from a clear spring-head, the story of the country life as set forth by him, this writer, the like of whom I had never before read. Why, we must have been blind all our lives; here were the most wonderful things possible going on under our very noses, but we saw them not. Nay, after reading all the books and all the papers—every one—that Jefferies wrote between the years 1876 and 1887, after learning from him all that he had to teach, I cannot yet see these things. I see a hedge; I see wild rose, honeysuckle, black briony—*herbe aux femmes battues*, the French poetically call it—blackberry, hawthorn, and elder. I see on the banks sweet wildflowers whose names I learn from year to year, and straightway forget because they grow not in the streets. I know very well, because Jefferies has told me so much, what I should be able to see in the hedge and on the bank besides these simple things; but yet I cannot see them, for all his teaching. Mine—alas!—

are eyes which have looked into shop windows and across crowded streets for half a century, save for certain intervals every year ; they are also eyes which need glasses ; they are slow to see things unexpected, ignorant of what should be expected ; they are helpless eyes when they are turned from men and women to flowers, ferns, weeds, and grasses ; they are, in fact, like unto the eyes of those men with whom I mostly consort. None of us—poor street-struck creatures !—can see the things we ought to see.

It happened unto me—by grace and special favour, I may call it—that in the course of my earthly pilgrimage I had for a great many years certain business transactions at regular short intervals with one who knew Jefferies well, because he married his only sister. The habit began, as soon as I learned that fact, of talking about Richard Jefferies as soon as our business was completed. Henceforward, therefore, week by week, I followed the fortunes of this man, and read not only his books and his papers, but learned his personal history, and heard what he was doing, and watched him curiously, unknown and unsuspected by himself.

To be sure, his own people knew little, except in general terms, about his intentions or projects. It was not in Jefferies' nature to consult them. Another thing I knew not, because, with characteristic pride and reserve, he did not suffer even his brother-in-law or his sister to know it—viz., the terrible poverty of his later days.

I have never looked upon the face of Richard Jefferies. This, now that it is too late, is to me a deep and abiding sorrow. I always hoped some day to see him—there seemed so much time ahead—and to tell him, face to face, what one *ought* to tell such a man—it is a plain duty to tell this truth to such a man—how greatly I admired and valued his work, with what joy I received it, with what eagerness I expected it, what splendid qualities I found in it, what instruction and elevation of soul I derived from it. I have never even seen this man. I was not a friend of his—I was not even a casual acquaintance—and yet I am writing his life. Perhaps, in this strange way, by reading all that he wrote, by connecting his work continually with what I learned of his life and habits, and by learning, day by

day, all the things which happened to him, I may have learned to know him more intimately even than some of those who rejoiced in being called his friends.

As for his personal habits, Jefferies was extremely simple and regular, even methodical. He breakfasted always at eight o'clock, often on nothing but dry toast and tea. After breakfast he went to his study, where he remained writing until half-past eleven. At that hour he always went out, whatever the weather and in all seasons, and walked until one o'clock. This morning walk was an absolute necessity for him. At one o'clock he returned and took an early dinner, which was his only substantial meal. His tastes were simple. He liked to have a plain roast or boiled joint, with abundance of vegetables, of which he was very fond, especially asparagus, sea-kale, and mushrooms. He would have preferred ale, but he found that light claret or burgundy suited him better, and therefore he drank daily a little of one or the other.

Dinner over, he read his daily paper, and slept for an hour by the fireside. Perhaps

this after-dinner sleep may be taken as a sign of physical weakness. A young man of thirty ought not to want an hour's sleep in the middle of the day. At three o'clock he awoke, and went for another walk, coming home at half-past four. He thus walked for three hours every day, which, for a quick walker, gives a distance of twelve miles—a very good allowance of fresh air. Men of all kinds, who have to keep the brain in constant activity, have found that the active exercise of walking is more valuable than any other way of recreation in promoting a healthy activity of the brain. To talk with children is a rest; to visit picture-galleries changes the current of thought; to play lawn tennis diverts the brain; but to walk both rests the brain and stimulates it. Jefferies acquired the habit of noting down in his walks, and storing away, those thousands of little things which make his writings the despair of people who think themselves minute observers. He took tea at five, and then worked again in his study till half-past eight, when he commonly finished work for the day. In other words, he gave up five hours of the

solid day to work. It is, I think, impossible for a man to carry on literary work of any but the humblest kind for more than five hours a day; three hours remained for exercise, and the rest for food, rest, and reading. He took a little supper at nine, of cold meat and bread, with a glass of claret, and then read or conversed until eleven, when he went to bed. He took tobacco very rarely.

He had not a large library, because the works which he most wished to procure were generally beyond his means. For instance, he was always desirous, but never able, to purchase Sowerby's "English Wild-Flowers." His favourite novelists were Scott and Charles Reade. The conjunction of these two names gives me singular pleasure, as to one who admires the great qualities of Reade. He also liked the works of Ouida and Miss Braddon. He never cared greatly for Charles Dickens. I think the reason why Dickens did not touch him was that the kind of lower middle-class life which Dickens knew so well, and loved to portray, belonged exclusively to the town, which Jefferies did not know, and not to the

country, which he did. He was never tired of Goethe's "Faust," which was always new to him. He loved old ballads, and among the poets, Dryden's works were his favourite reading. In one thing he was imperious: the house must be kept quiet—absolutely quiet—while he was at work. Any household operations that made the least noise had to be postponed till he went out for his walk.

I have before me a great number of note-books filled with observations, remarks, ideas, hints, and suggestions of all kinds by him. He carried them about during his walks, and while he was always watching the infinite wealth and variety of Nature, the multitudinous forms of life, he was always noting down what he saw. To read these note-books is like reading an unclassified index to the works of Nature. And since they throw so much light upon his methods, and prove—if that wanted any proof—how careful he was to set down nothing that had not been noted and proved by himself, I have copied some few pages, which are here reproduced. Observe that these extracts are taken almost at random

from two or three note-books. The writing is cramped, and in parts very difficult to make out.

"*Oct.* 16, 1878.—Wasp and very large blue-fly struggling, wrestling on leaf. In a few seconds wasp got the mastery, brought his tail round, and stung twice or thrice; then bit off the fly's proboscis, then the legs, then bit behind the head, then snipped off the wings, then fell off leaf, but flew with burden to the next, rolled the fly round, and literally devoured its intestines. Dropped off the leaf in its eager haste, got on third leaf, and continued till nothing was left but a small part of the body—the head had been snipped off before. This was one of those large black flies—a little blue underneath—not like meat flies, but bigger and squarer, that go to the ivy. Ivy in bloom close by, where, doubtless, the robber found his prey and seized it.

"While the other leaves fall, the thick foliage of the fir supports the leaves that have been wafted to it, so that the fir's branches are thickly sprinkled with other leaves."

"*Surrey*, *Oct.* 27.—Red-wings numerous, and good many fieldfares.

"Ivy, brown reddish leaves, and pale-green ribs."

"*Oct.* 29.—Saw hawk perched on telegraph line out of railway-carriage window. Train passed by within ten yards; hawk did not move.

"Street mist, London, not fog, but on clear day comes up about two-thirds the height of the houses."

"*Nov.* 3.—The horse-chestnut buds at end of boughs; tree quite bare of leaves; all sticky, colour of deep varnish, strongly adhesive. These showed on this tree very fully.

"Golden-crested wren, pair together Nov. 3; 'cheep-cheep' as they slipped about maple bush, and along and up oak bough; motions like the tree-climber up a bough; the crest triangular, point towards beak, spot of yellow on wing.

"Still day; the earth holds its breath."

"*Nov.* 11.—Gold-crested wren and tom-tit on furze clinging to the very spikes, and apparently busy on the tiny green buds now showing thickly on the prickles.

"The contemplation of the star, the sun, the tree raises the soul into a trance of inner sight of nature."

"*Nov.* 17.—Sycamore leaves—some few still on—spotted with intensely black spots an inch across. Willow buds showing."

"*Nov.* 23.—Oaks most beautiful in sun—elms nearly leafless, also beech and willow—but oaks still in full leaf, some light-brown, still trace of green, some brown, some buff, and tawny almost, save in background, toned by shadow, a trace of red. The elms hid them in summer; now the oaks stand out the most prominent objects everywhere, and are seen to be three times as numerous as expected."

"*Nov.* 25.—Thrushes singing again; a mild day after week or two cold."

"*Dec.* 23.—Red-wings came within a yard, Velt (?) came within ten, wood-pigeon the same. Weasel hunting hedge under snow; under-ground in ivy as busy as possible; good time for them."

"*Jan.* 6.—Very sharp frost, calm, some sun in morning, dull at noon."

"*Jan.* 7.—Frost, wind, dull."

"*Jan.* 8.—Frost light, strong N.E. wind."

"*Jan.* 9.—Frost light, some little snow, wind N.E., light.

"*Jan.* 10.—Very fine, sunny, N.E. wind, sharp frosty morning.

"Orange moss on old tiles on cattle-sheds and barns a beautiful colour; a picture."

"*Feb.* 7.—Larks soaring and singing the first time; one to an immense height; rain in morning, afternoon mild but a strong wind from west; catkins on hazel, and buds on some hazel-bushes; missel-thrush singing in copse; spring seems to have burst on us all at once; chaffinches pairing, or trying to; fighting."

"*Feb.* 8.—Numerous larks soaring; copse quite musical; now the dull clouds of six weeks have cleared away, we see the sun has got up quite high in the sky at noon."

"*Feb.* 12.—Rooks, five, wading into flood in meadow, almost up to their breasts; lark soaring and singing at half-past five, evening; light declining; partridges have paired.

"No blue geranium in Surrey that I have seen."

"*Feb.* 17.—Rooks busy at nests, jackdaws at steeple; sliding down with wings extended, 4.50, to gardens below at great speed."

"*Feb.* 20.—Ploughs at work again; have not seen them for three months almost."

"*Feb.* 21.—Snow three or four inches; broom bent down; the green stalks that stand up bent right down; afterwards bright sunshine for some hours, and then clouded again."

"*Feb.* 22.—Berries on wild ivy on birch-tree, round and fully-formed and plentiful; berries not formed on garden ivy."

"*Feb.* 27.—Snow on ground since morning of 21st; four wild ducks going over to east; first seen here for two years; larks fighting and singing over snow; thawing; snow disappeared during day; tomtit at birch-tree buds; pigeons still in large flocks."

"*March* 7.—Splendid day; warm sun, scarcely any wind; wood-pigeons calling in copse here."

"*April* 16.—Elms beginning to get green with leaf-buds; apple leaf-buds opening green."

"*May* 12.—A real May-day at last; warm, west wind, sunshine; birds singing as if hearts would burst; four or five blackbirds all in hearing at once; butterfly, small white, tipped with yellowish red; song of thrush more varied even than nightingale; if rare, people would go miles to hear it, never the same in same bird, and every bird different; fearless, too; *operatic* singer.

"More stitchwort; now common; it looks like ten petals,

but is really five ; the top of the petal divided, which gives the appearance : a delicate, beautiful white ; leaves in pairs, pointed.

"Humble-bees do suck cowslips."

"*May* 14.—Lark singing beautifully in the still dark and clouded sky at a quarter to three o'clock in the morning ; about twenty minutes afterwards the first thrush ; thought I heard distant cuckoo—not sure ; and ten minutes after that the copse by garden perfectly ringing with the music. A beautiful May morning ; thoroughly English morning : southerly wind, warm light breeze, smart showers of warm rain, and intervals of brilliant sunshine : the leaves in copse beautiful delicate green, refreshed, cleaned, and a still more lovely green from the shower ; behind them the blue sky, and above the bright sun ; white detached clouds sailing past. That is the morning ; afternoon more cloudy.

"More swifts later in evening. The first was flying low down against wind ; seemed to progress from tip to tip of wing, alternately throwing himself along, now one tip downwards, now the other, like hand-over-hand swimming. Furze-chat, first in furze opposite, perched on high branch of furze above the golden blossom thick on that branch ; a way of shaking wings while perched ; 'chat-chat' low ; head and part of neck black, white ring or band below, brownish general colour. Nightingale singing on elm-branch—a large, thick branch, projecting over the green by roadside—perched some twenty-five feet high. Yellow-hammer noticed a day or two ago perched on branch lengthwise, not across. Oaks : more oaks out. Ash : thought I saw one with the large black buds enlarged and lengthened, but not yet burst."

"*May* 18.—The white-throat feeds on the brink of the ditch, perching on fallen sticks or small bushes ; there is then no appearance of a crest ; afterwards he flies up to the topmost twig of the bush, or on a sapling tree, and immedi-

ately he begins to sing, and the feathers on the top of his head are all ruffled up, as if brushed the wrong way."

"*May* 20.—Coo of dove in copse first."

"*May* 21.—The flies teased in the lane to-day—the first time."

Such a man as Jefferies, with his necessities of fresh air and solitude, should have been adopted and tenderly nursed by some rich man; or he should have been piloted by some agent who would have transacted all his business for him, placed his articles in the most advantageous way, procured him the best price possible for his books, and relieved him from the trouble of haggling and bargaining—a necessary business to one who lives by his pen, but to one of his disposition an intolerable trouble. It would, again, one thinks, have proved a profitable speculation if some publisher had given him a small solid income in return for having all his work. Consider: for the truly beautiful papers on the country life which Jefferies wrote, there were the magazines in which they might first appear, both American and English, and there was the volume form afterwards. Would four hundred pounds a year—to Jefferies it would have

seemed affluence—have been too much to pay for such a man? I think that from a commercial point of view, even including the year when he was too ill to do any work, it might have paid so to run Jefferies. As it was, he had no one to advise him. He drifted helplessly from publisher to publisher. His name stood high, and rose steadily higher, yet he made no more money by his books. The value of his work rose no higher—it even fell lower. This curious fact—that increase of fame should not bring increase of money—Jefferies did not and could not understand. It constantly irritated and annoyed him. He thought that he was being defrauded out of his just dues. On this point I will, however, speak again immediately.

The young couple remained at Swindon until February, 1877, when Jefferies thought himself justified in giving up his post on the *North Wilts Herald*, and in removing nearer London. But it must not be too near London. He must only be near in the sense of ready access by train. Therefore he took a house at Surbiton—it was at No. 2, Woodside. At this

semi-rural place one is near to the river, the fields, and the woods. It is not altogether a desertion of the country. Jefferies *could* not leave the country altogether. It was necessary for him to breathe the fresh air of the turf and the fragrance of the newly-turned clods. He could not live, much less work, unless he did this. As for his work, that was daily suggested and stimulated by this continual communing with Nature. Poverty might prick him—it might make him uneasy for the moment—it never made him unhappy—but unless his brain was full to overflowing, he could not work. Out of the abundance of his heart his mouth spoke. It seems, indeed, futile to regret that such a man as this did not make a more practical advantage to himself out of his success. He could not. If a man cannot, he cannot. Just as in scientific observation there is a personal equation, so in the conduct of life there is a personal limitation. Some unknown force holds back a man when he has reached a certain point. The life of every man, rightly studied, shows his personal limitation. But without the whole life of a

man spread out before us, it is not easy to understand where this personal limitation begins. There is no more to be said when this is once understood. It is a matter of personal limitation. Those kindly people who continually occupy themselves with the concerns of their neighbours, constantly go wrong because they do not understand the personal limitation. What we call fate is often another word for limitation. Why do I not write better English, and why have I not a nobler style, and why cannot I become the greatest writer who ever lived? Because I cannot rise above a certain level. If I am a wise man, I find out that level; I reach it, and am content therewith. Why did not Jefferies make himself rich with the opportunities he had? Because he could not. Because to grasp an opportunity and to turn it to his own material interest was a thing beyond his personal limitation. To seize Time by the forelock, though he go ever so slowly, is to some men impossible. For while they look on and hesitate, another steps in before them; or the world is looking on and observes the situation, ready to sneer

and snigger, and there seems a kind of meanness in the act—very likely there *is* meanness; or to do so one must trample on one's neighbours; or one must desert one's habits of life, throw over all that one loves, and make a change of which the least that can be said is that it is certain to make one uncomfortable for the remainder of life.

Therefore, Jefferies suffered that forelock to be plucked by another, and continued to wander about the fields. He had now indeed attained the object of his ambition. He was not only a recognised and successful writer, but his work was also looked for and loved. Happy that author who knows that his work is expected before it is ready, and is loved when it appears. Henceforth he made no more mistakes. He understood by this time his personal limitation. His work, as well as his days, must be concerning the fields and the wild life. Year after year that work becomes more beautiful until the end. As for an income, it was mainly secured by his contributions to the magazines and journals. He wrote, during the last ten years of his life, for nearly all the

magazines, but especially for *Longman's*. He also contributed to the *Standard*, the *St. James's*, the *Pall Mall*, the *Graphic*, the *World*, and other papers. Most of these articles he gathered together as soon as there were enough of them, and published them in a volume. In this way he made a little more out of them. He even contrived to save a little money. But his income was never very great.

The first five of the works on the country life were published by Messrs. Smith and Elder. These were the "Gamekeeper at Home," "Wild Life in a Southern County," "The Amateur Poacher," "Greene Ferne Farm," and "Round About a Great Estate." Then he did either a very foolish or a very unfortunate thing. He left Messrs. Smith and Elder, and for the rest of his life he went about continually changing his publisher, always in the hope of getting a better price for his volumes, and always chafing at the smallness of the pecuniary result. An author should never change his publisher, unless he is compelled to do so by the misfortune of starting

with a shark, a thing which has happened unto many. The very fact of having all his works in the same hands greatly assists their sale. A reader who is delighted, for instance, with "Red Deer," and would wish to get other books by the same author, finds the name of Longmans on the back, but no list of those books published by Smith and Elder, Chatto and Windus, Cassell and Co., and Sampson Low and Co. I have myself found it very difficult to get a complete set of Jefferies' books. At the London Library, even, they do not possess a complete set. Then that reader lays down his book, and presently forgets his purpose. I suppose that there are very few, even of Jefferies' greatest admirers, who actually possess all his works.

He was, as I have already said, bitter against publishers for the small sums they offered him. He made the not uncommon mistake of supposing that, because the reviews spoke of his works in terms so laudatory, which, indeed, no reviewers could refrain from doing, the public were eagerly buying them. I have, myself, had perhaps an exceptional experience

of authors, their grumblings, and their grievances, and I know that this confusion of thought — this unwarranted conclusion — is very widespread. An author, that is to say, reads a highly-complimentary review of his work, and looks for an immense and immediate demand in consequence for that work. Well, every good review helps a book, undoubtedly, but to a much smaller extent, from the pecuniary point of view, than is generally believed. The demand for a book is created in quite other ways; partly by the author's previous works, which, little by little, or, if he is lucky, at a single bound, create a *clientèle* of those who like his style; partly by the talk of people who tell each other what they have read, and recommend this or that book. Then, since most books are read from the circulating library, and that kind of personal recommendation, especially with a new writer, takes time, the libraries are able to get along with a comparatively small number of copies; in fact, an author may have a very considerable name, and yet make, even with the honourable houses, quite a small sum of money by any work

Again, this is not, one sorrowfully owns, a country which buys books. My compatriots will buy everything and anything, except books. They will lavish their money in every conceivable manner, except one—they never commit extravagances in buying books. For the greater part, the three-guinea subscription to the library is the whole of the family expenditure for the greatest, the only unfailing, delight that life has to offer them.

Again, in the case of Richard Jefferies, the demand for his books was confined to a comparatively small number of readers. I do not suppose that his work will ever be widely popular, and yet I am certain that his reputation will grow and increase. Of all modern writers, I know of none of whom one can predict with such absolute certainty that he will live. He will surely live. He draws, as no other writer has done, the actual life of rural England under Queen Victoria. For the very fidelity of these pictures alone he must live. No other writers, except Jefferies and Thomas Hardy, have been able to depict this life. And, what is even more, as the hills, and fields, and

woods, and streams are ever with us, whether we are savages or civilized beings, whatever our manners, dress, fashions, laws or customs, the man who speaks with truth of these speaks for all time and for all mankind.

Yet he is not, and will never be, widely popular. There are many persons, presumably persons of culture, who cannot read Jefferies. A country parson—poor man!—observed to me in Swindon itself, that he hoped the biography of Richard Jefferies would not prove so dry as the works of Richard Jefferies. These, he said, with the cheerful dogmatism of his kind, were as dry as a stick, and impossible to read. Now, this good man was probably in some sort a scholar. He lives in the Jefferies county. All round him are the hills and downs described in these works. To us those hills and downs are now filled with life, beauty, and all kinds of delightful things, entirely through those very books. The good vicar finds them so dry that he cannot read them. Others there are who complain that Jefferies is always "cataloguing." One understands what is meant. To

some of us the picture is always being improved by the addition of another blade of grass, another dead leaf, or the ear of a hare visible among the turnip-tops; others are fatigued by these little details. Jefferies is too full for them.

Another thing against him in the minds of the frivolous is that you cannot skip in reading Jefferies. To take up a volume is to read it right through from beginning to end. You can no more skip Jefferies than you can skip Emerson. Now, most readers like to rush a volume. You cannot rush Jefferies. I defy the most rapid reader to rush Jefferies. You might as well try to rush the Proof of the Binomial Theorem. Others there are who like to be made to laugh or to cry. This man never laughs. You may, perhaps, put down the book and smile at the incongruities of the rustic talk, but you do not laugh. Hardy's rustics will make you laugh a whole summer's day through, but Jefferies' rustics never. He is always in earnest. Hardy is a humorist; Jefferies is not. And, worst sin of all in him who courts popularity, he makes his readers

think. Men who live alone, who walk about alone, who commune with Nature all day long, do not laugh, and do not make others laugh.

For these reasons, then, among others, Jefferies was never popular, despite the laudatory reviews and the readiness with which editors welcomed his work.

As to the remuneration which he received. With these considerations in our minds, let us next remember that publishing is a business undertaken, not for love of literature or of authors, but for profit, for a livelihood, for making money. It is, therefore, conducted upon "business principles." Now, in business of every kind, the first rule is that the business man must "make a profit on every transaction." You must pay your publisher, if you engage one, just as you must pay your solicitor. This is fair, just, and honest. You must pay him for his time and his trouble. He must be paid either by the author, or out of the books which he sells. The only question, therefore, not including certain awkward points into which we need not here enter—I am

speaking only of honourable houses—is what proportion of a book's returns, or what sum, should be paid to a publisher for his trouble. Now, I have learned enough of the sale of Jefferies' books, and of the sums which he received for them, to be satisfied that his publishers' services were by no means exorbitantly paid by the sale of his books, and that no more, from a business point of view, could have been given. That is to say, if more had been given, it would have been as a free gift, or act of charity, which this author would have spurned. All these things, however, he could not understand, perhaps because they were never explained to him.

I have been told by one who knew Jefferies from boyhood that he was indolent, and would never have worked had it not been for necessity. His writings do not convey to me the idea of an indolent man. On the contrary, they are those of a man of an intellect so active that he must have been compelled to work. Yet one can understand that he could not work, after making the grand discovery of what his work should be, until his brain was overflowing

with the subject. Generally it was a single and a simple subject round which he wove his tapestry. The subject once conceived, he could do nothing until his brain was charged and possessed with it.

His life has henceforth no incidents to record, except those of work and illness. He worked, he walked, he wrote, he walked again, he read, he watched and observed, he thought. That is his life, until illness fell upon him. Always a silent man, always a man of few friends, always a man of simple habits, in all weathers delighting to be out of doors, refusing to put on a great-coat or to carry an umbrella.

He changed his residence several times. From Surbiton, where he stayed for five years, he went to West Brighton, to a house called "Savernake." Did he himself christen it after the forest which he knew so well? Thence, in 1884, he went to Eltham, where he took a house in the Victoria Road. Then, I suppose, an irresistible yearning for some place far from men seized him, for he moved again, and went to live at a cottage two miles and a half from Crowborough Station, near Crowborough Hill,

the highest spot in Sussex. Again he stayed for a few weeks on the Quantock Hills, Somerset. Lastly, he went to live at a house called Sea View, at Goring, where he died.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LONGMAN LETTERS.

Mr. Charles Longman, who for the last eight years of Jefferies' life was one of his most constant friends, has lent me a packet of letters written to him by Jefferies between the years 1878 and 1886. They form by themselves, like the previous letters to Mrs. Harrild, a kind of diary of his life during that period.

"The papers on the 'Gamekeeper at Home,' in the *Pall Mall Gazette*," Mr. Longman writes, "were the first things of Jefferies' that attracted me. I thought at once that they seemed to me written by a man who could see more of the secrets of nature than anyone whose work I had ever come across. I wrote to Mr. George Smith, asking him to forward a letter to the writer of the papers,

whose name I did not know. In the letter I proposed that he should write a complete work on Shooting, to be what Hawker's work was forty years ago. He never did it; but this was the beginning of my friendship with this most interesting man."

"He never did it." Jefferies could never do anything which did not spring from his own brain. He has written admirable pages on kindred subjects—he was the very man to write such a book—and it would undoubtedly have proved a most popular book. Why, there is not a gentleman's house in the three kingdoms or the colonies which would not desire to have a copy of such a work. But the work was proposed to him by another man, therefore Jefferies could not see his way to put his heart in it. However, he did think of it; he even went so far as to draw up a scheme of the work. He would have chapters on the gun, the gun-room, the art of shooting, etiquette of the field, the dog, the various kinds of game, and so forth. Presently, we hear that the book is actually begun; that there are difficulties about getting information

as to various points; that he has been occupied with the various kinds of game, and so on. He also mentions with complacency pardonable and even praiseworthy that he has received a proposal to write two books from a leading Edinburgh firm. Nothing apparently came of this proposal. It is, however, noticeable, and to young writers it should be very encouraging, that no sooner did his first really good book appear — the "Gamekeeper at Home"—than his genius was at once recognised, and the best publishers began inviting him to write for them. He then offers a novel —always a novel!—which Messrs. Longmans' reader does not advise the house to accept. What was that novel? Perhaps one of those which had already been refused by one publisher, if not by more. Pending the writing and completion of the book on Shooting, he submits another proposal. He says:

"To carry out this volume I must partly lay aside some MSS. which I had previously begun, and before writing it I should like to hear your opinion on the subject. The provisional title

of one for which I have accumulated materials and ideas for some time is 'The Proletariate: the Power of the Future.' It has been my lot to see a great deal of the Labour Question, not only agricultural, but also urban." Really? Urban? Where, how, and in what period of his life did he get his urban experience? Was it on the streets of Swindon, that great centre of life and thought? "And it seems to me that all politics are slowly resolving into this one great point." He means that the condition of the people all over the world is rapidly becoming the dominant question. He was right; but he spoke ten years too soon. "Religion, society, institutions of every kind are affected. No doubt you saw the extraordinary account in the *Times* recently of the burial of a Socialist in Germany, and the marked progress of their doctrines. There are several books on wages, capital and labour, etc., but it seems to me that most thinkers and writers treat the subject on grounds too narrow. Of wages I propose to say very little. My idea is to point out how proletarian influences are at work everywhere under the sur-

face. The Church, the Chapel, the Houses of Parliament, legislation, society, at home; abroad, the same. Note the Nihilism in Russia, and the railway insurrection in the United States lately. Everywhere the masses are heaving and fermenting. In our own rural districts I clearly foresee changes in the future through the education now beginning of the cottagers. Personally, I have little feeling, and my book will be absolutely free of party politics. I look at it much as I should dissect and analyze a given period in the history of ancient Rome."

Nothing came of this proposal, and, indeed, one feels that Jefferies was not the man to write such a book. Of the people in other countries he knew nothing but what he read in the papers; of the people at home he knew only the agricultural portion; and though he had read a great many books he was in no sense an historical student. But he was still young, and it still seemed to him, as to all young writers, that he could write a book upon any subject which it interested him to read about in the papers or elsewhere.

The same letter contains another idea. It is that of a book on "The History of the English Squire." This seems a very good subject for a competent person. Perhaps someone will take up the idea and write the history of the English squire before he becomes extinct. One would like to see how, first, the yeoman added acre to acre, ousting his neighbour, and so became the squire; then how, gradually, all over the country, owing to the action of forces too strong for him, the yeoman began to disappear; how the squire was able to add more acres, buying out yeoman after yeoman, always on the look-out to buy more land, and therefore always becoming more important; and how, presently, he got a title, which he now "enjoys," claiming superiority of blood and descent, while the ex-yeoman, once his equal, is now his tenant, and humbly doffs his hat. Jefferies, one feels convinced, ought to have written a most interesting and instructive volume upon this subject, if—which he has never shown—he had the patience for historical research and investigation.

He presently forwards a specimen chapter for the Shooting-Book. That was in September, 1878. In October he formally accepted the business arrangements offered by the firm, undertook the work, and signed the agreement. There follows here a gap of three years. When the letters are resumed, Jefferies is living at West Brighton (December, 1882). He offers to contribute to the new *Longman's Magazine*, and proposes an article consisting of three short sketches. (1) The Acorn-gatherer; (2) The Legend of a Gateway; and (3) A Roman Brook. This article, in fact, appeared under the title of "Bits of Oak Bark."

He presently speaks of his long illness, which has kept him out of the world. "I see," he says, "that you have got out the Shooting-Book under the title of 'The Dead Shot.'" This, however, was a reprint of an old book. Mr. Longman's idea of a complete manual for shooting has since been carried out in "The Badminton Library." "No wonder; I could not expect anyone to be more patient than you were. But even now I hope some day to send in a manuscript."

He is also ready to write another book. This time it is to be a series of "short story-sketches of life and character, incident and nature. I want to express the deeper feelings with which observation of life-histories has filled me, and I assure you I have as large a collection of these facts and incidents—the natural history of the heart—as I have ever written about birds and trees." In short, he proposes to write a series which shall take the place in the magazine of the novel, and says that he has enough material to carry him along until the year 1890, or longer. "Why not let other contributors, besides the novelist, occasionally give you a series? For myself, I have given up English novels and taken to the French, which are at least bright, short, dramatic, and amusing." The poor English novelist! He has to endure a great deal. Whenever an editor is in want of a subject for a leading article, or a critic for something to talk about, he has a fling at the English novelist. The greatest artist and the smallest, most insignificant story-teller ; the master and the apprentice ; the observer of manners and

the school-girl—all are lumped together by the critic who has nothing else to write about, and discussed under the title of "the English Novelist." And to think that Jefferies — Richard Jefferies — should throw his stone! Oh! 'tis too much! But Nemesis fell upon him, for he presently wrote "Green Ferne Farm," which is neither short, bright, dramatic, nor amusing. That proposed series did not appear. He says, a few days afterwards, that he has begun a paper asked for by Mr. Longman on "The County Suffrage." This paper subsequently appeared under the title of "After the County Suffrage."

It was in June, 1883, that *Longman's Magazine* contained the article called "The Pageant of Summer." This fine paper, the best thing ever written by Jefferies, glorified the whole of that number. There has never been, I think, in any magazine any article like unto it, so splendid in imagery and language, so perfectly truthful, so overflowing with observation, so full of the deepest feeling, so tender and so touching, so generous of thought and suggestion. In this paper Jefferies reached

his highest point. There are plenty of single pages and detached passages in which he has equalled the "Pageant of Summer;" but there is no one chapter, no single article, in which he has sustained throughout the elevation of this noble paper. I will return to "The Pageant of Summer" later on.

Although he wrote this paper while in dire straits of poverty; although he had already entered that valley whose gloomy sides continually narrow; where the slopes become, little by little, precipices; where the light grows dim, and where the spectre of death slowly rises before the eyes and takes shape: although he lived poorly; although he continued unknown to the mass of the reading world, who passed him by, everything, to us, seems compensated by the splendid power which he had now acquired of thinking such thoughts and expressing them in such language. I have heard it said by some that Jefferies wrote too much. Not a single page too much, beginning from the "Gamekeeper at Home," and thinking only of the "Gamekeeper's" legitimate successors! That is to say, we are

prepared to surrender portions, but not all—saving great pieces, huge cantles, here and there whole chapters—of "Bevis," "Wood Magic," "After London," "Green Ferne Farm," "The Dewy Morn," and even "Amaryllis." We will blot out everything that has to do with the ordinary figures, conversations, and situations of what the writer called a novel. But of the rest we will not part with one single line. Year after year—generation after generation—the truth and fidelity and beauty of these pages will sink deeper and deeper into the heart of the world. So deeply will they sink, so long will they live, that he who writes a memoir of this man trembles for thinking that when future ages ask who and what was the man who wrote these things, the pages which contain his life may seem unequal to the subject—too low, pedestrian, and creeping for the greatness of the author he commemorates.

I return to the packet of letters. They go on to offer articles, and to explain how promised papers are getting on. He wrote nine papers in all for *Longman's Magazine*—namely,

three in 1883, two in 1884, one in 1885, one in 1886, and two, which appeared after his death, in the year 1887.

In June of 1883 he offers a manuscript which, he says, he has been meditating for seventeen years. In that case he must have begun to think of it at eighteen. This, if one begins to consider, is by no means improbable. On the contrary, I think it is extremely probable, and that Jefferies meant his words to be taken literally. The thoughts of a boy are long thoughts. Sometimes one remembers, by some strange trick of memory—it shows how the past never dies, but may be recalled at any moment—a train of thought which filled the mind on some day long passed away, when one was a lad of eighteen; a child; almost an infant. At such a moment one is astonished to remember that this thought filled the brain so early. As for the age of adolescence, there is no time when the brain is more active to question, to imagine, to create, to inform; none, when the mind is more eager to arrive at certainty; none, more hopeful of the future; none, more anxious to arrive at the truth.

Therefore, when Jefferies tells Mr. Longman that he has meditated "The Story of My Heart" for eighteen years, I believe him: not that he then consciously called the work by that or by any other name, but that the book is the outcome of so long a period of thought and questioning. "It is," he says, "a real record—unsparing to myself as to all things — absolutely and unflinchingly true."

The book was published with Longman's autumn list in October, 1883. I have something to say about it in another chapter.

Jefferies' industry at this time seems superhuman. The MS. of "The Story of My Heart" is no sooner out of his hands, than he asks Mr. Longman if he will look at another. This time it is his "Red Deer," which I really believe to be the very best book of the kind ever produced. This is what he says himself about it:

"The title is 'Red Deer,' and it is a minute account of the natural history of the wild deer of Exmoor, and of the modes of

hunting them. I went all over Exmoor a short time since on foot in order to see the deer for myself, and in addition I had the advantage of getting full information from the huntsman himself, and from others who have watched the deer for twenty years past. The chase of the wild stag is a bit out of the life of the fifteenth century brought down to our own times. Nothing has ever interested me so much, and I contemplate going down again. In addition, there are a number of Somerset poaching tricks which were explained to me by gamekeepers and by a landowner there, besides a few curious superstitions. There seem to be no books about the deer—I mean the wild deer. A book called 'Collyer's Chase of the Wild Red Deer' was published many years ago, but is not now to be had."

"Red Deer" was brought out by Longmans in 1884.

In December, 1883, he offers "The Dewy Morn." The proposal came to nothing. The book was published in the following year by Messrs. Chapman and Hall. In February, 1884, he speaks of a letter written to him by Lord

Ebrington, master of the Devon and Somerset staghounds, upon his "Red Deer." Certain small errors were pointed out for correction, but, as he points out with satisfaction, no serious omission or fault had been discovered.

In a letter written in March he mentions that an anonymous correspondent has been scourging him with Scripture texts on account of the "Story of My Heart." That anonymous correspondent! How he lieth in wait for everybody! how omniscient he is! how unsparing! how certain and sure of everything! The texts which this person used to belabour poor Jefferies were, however, singularly inappropriate. "O Lord," he quotes, "how glorious are Thy works! Thy thoughts are very deep. An unwise man doth not consider this, and a FOOL doth not understand it." The word "fool" was doubly underlined, so that there should be no mistake as to the practical application of the passage. The anonymous correspondent is, indeed, always very particular on this point. But Jefferies had been all his life commenting on the glory of those works, and endeavouring to apprehend

and to realize, if only a little, the meaning and the depth of these thoughts. The cry of his heart all through the book is for fuller insight—for a deeper understanding.

He goes on to speak of his illness. It is not, he says, at all serious; but it will make him go to London to see a physician, and it is likely to prevent him from getting about. There is a paper (not one of these letters) among his literary remains, in which he describes the symptoms at length.

In April he writes a long letter about many things, but especially his "After London."

"I have just put the finishing touch to my new book. It is in three volumes." As published by Cassell and Co. it was in one volume, and it leaves off with the story only half told. Perhaps the author cut it down, perhaps the publishers refused to bring it out unless as a short one-volume work. "It is called," he says, "'After London,' with a second title, 'Chronicles of the House of Aquila.' The first part describes the relapse of England into barbarism; how the roads are covered

with grass, how the brambles extend over the fields, and in time woods occupy the country. These woods are filled with wild animals—descendants of the dogs, cats, swine, horses, and cattle that were left, and gradually returned to their original wild nature. The rivers are choked, and a great lake forms in the centre of the island.

"Such inhabitants as remain are resident about the shores of the lake—the forest being without roads, and their only communication being by water. They have lost printing and gunpowder; they use the bow and arrow, and wear armour, but retain some traces of the arts and of civilization. At the same time, slavery exists, and moral tyranny. There are numerous petty kingdoms and republics at war with each other. Knights and barons possess fortified dwellings, and exercise unbounded power within their stockaded estates—stockaded against bushmen, forest savages, against bands of gipsies, and against wild cattle and horses.

"The Welsh issue from their mountains, claiming England as having belonged to their

ancestors. They succeed in conquering a section, but are confronted by other invaders, for the Irish, thinking that now is the time for their revenge, land at Chester. These invaders to some degree neutralize each other, yet they form a standing menace to the South, and more civilized portion.

"The state of the site of London is fully described. It is, I think, an original picture.

"The second part, or 'Chronicles of the House of Aquila,' treats of the manner of life, the hunting journeys through the forest, the feasts and festivals, and, in short, the entire life of the time. Ultimately, one of them starts on a voyage round the great inland lake, and his adventures are followed. He assists at a siege, and visits the site of London.

"All these matters are purposely dealt with in minute detail so that they may appear actual realities, and the incidents stand out as if they had just happened. There is a love affair, but it is in no sense a novel; more like a romance, but no romance of a real character.

"First, you see, I have to picture the con-

dition of the country 'After London,' and then to set my heroes to work, and fight, and travel in it."

This book was brought out, as stated above, by Cassell and Co. in 1886. The idea is indeed truly original. Had it been more of a novel, with an end, as well as a beginning, it would have proved more successful.

"You tell me," Jefferies continues, "that I write too much. To me it seems as if I wrote nothing, more especially since my illness; for this is the third year I have been so weakened. To me, I say, it seems as if I wrote nothing, for my mind teems with ideas, and my difficulty is to know what to do with them. I not only sketch out the general plan of a book almost instantaneously, but I can see every little detail of it from the first page to the last. The mere writing—the handwriting—is the only trouble; it is very wearying. At this moment I have several volumes quite complete in my mind. Scarce a day goes by but I put down a fresh thought. I have twelve note-books crammed full of ideas, plots, sketches of papers, and so on."

These are probably the note-books of which I have spoken, and from which I have quoted.

The following, dated January 29, 1885, refers to a copy of the Badminton hunting-book sent him by Mr. Longman:

"You have made me pretty miserable. I have just read the otter chapter, and I can see it all so plainly—the rocks and the rush of water, and the oaks of June above. Have you ever seen the Exe and Barle? It is a land of Paradise. So you have made me miserable enough, being on all-fours; literally not able to go even on three, as the Sphynx said, but on four, crawling upstairs on hands and knees, and nailed to the uneasy chair."

He offers more work from Crowborough (May 1, 1884 or 1885, uncertain). There is a new novel of which he speaks, called "A Bit of Human Nature," which never appeared, and was probably never written. The rest of the letters belong to the last few months of his life, and must be reserved for the last chapter.

Enough has been quoted from these letters to show the extraordinary mental activity of the man. He is continually planning new work. He sees a whole book spread out before him complete in all its details. To make a book—that is to say, to imagine a book already made,—is nothing; what troubles him is the writing it. This temperament, however, is fatal to novel-writing, because characters cannot be seen at once; they must be studied, they require time to grow in the brain. But Jefferies cannot write enough. It seems to his fertile brain, fevered with long sickness, as if he did nothing.

CHAPTER IX.

THE COUNTRY LIFE.

It was then, very slowly, and after many hesitations, false starts, deviations, and mistakes, that Jefferies at last discovered himself and his real powers. He had written, for obscure country papers, pages of local descriptions: he had written feeble and commonplace novels, which all fell dead at their birth, and of which none survive to reproach his memory or to darken the splendour of his later work. He had also written practical common-sense papers on agriculture, the farmer and the farm-labourer. He thus worked his way slowly, first to the mere mechanical art of writing, that is, to the expression, somehow or other, of thought and ideas; next, when this was acquired, he endeavoured to depict society, of which he knew

nothing, and its manners, of which he was completely ignorant; thirdly, after many years of blundering along the wrong road, he advanced to the perception of the great truth that he who would succeed in the great profession of letters must absolutely write on some subject that he knows, and that he should understand his own limitations. For instance, Jefferies, as we have seen, ardently desired to become a novelist. If a man be habitually observant of his fellow-men, if he have the eye of a humourist, a brain which is like a store-house for capacity, a fair measure of the dramatic faculty, an instinctive power of selection, and the faculty of getting away from his own individuality altogether, he will perhaps do well to try the profession of a novelist. But Jefferies possessed one only of these faculties: he had a brain which would hold millions of facts, each consigned to its proper place: but he had little or no humour: he had no power of creating situation and incident: and he could never possibly get outside himself and away from his own people. He could not, therefore, become a novelist: that line of work—though

he never understood it—was closed to him from the beginning. Nature herself stood before him, though he neither saw nor heard her, as Balaam could not see the angel, and barred his way. But when he discovered his own incomparable gift, which was not until he was nearly thirty years of age, he sprang suddenly before the world as one who could speak of Nature and her wondrous works in field and forest, as no man ever spake before.

There is a passage in Thomas Hardy's "Woodlanders" which might have been written of Richard Jefferies. The words, which could only have been written by one who himself knows the country life, concern a pair, not one :

"The casual glimpses which the ordinary population bestowed upon that wondrous world of sap and leaves called the Hintock woods had been, with these two, a clear gaze. They had been possessed of its finer mysteries as of commonplace knowledge; had been able to read its hieroglyphs as ordinary writing;

to them the sights and sounds of night, winter, wind, storm, amid those dense boughs, were simple occurrences whose origin, continuance, and laws they foreknew. They had planted together, and together they had felled; together they had, with the run of the years, mentally collected those remoter signs and symbols which seen in few were of runic obscurity, but all together made an alphabet. From the light lashing of the twigs upon their faces when brushing through them in the dark, they could pronounce upon the species of the tree whence they stretched; from the quality of the wind's murmur through a bough they could in like manner name its sort afar off. They knew by a glance at a trunk if its heart were sound, or tainted with incipient decay; and by the state of its upper twigs the stratum that had been reached by its roots. The artifices of the seasons were seen by them from the conjuror's own point of view, and not from that of the spectator."

There are not in the whole of the English-speaking world, which now numbers close

upon a hundred million, more, I suppose, than forty thousand who read Jefferies' works. Out of the forty thousand not one-half have read them all. For some are contented with the "Gamekeeper at Home," "Red Deer," and the "Amateur Poacher." Some have on their shelves "The Life in the Fields," or "The Open Air." Few, indeed, have read all those books which came from his brain in so full and clear a stream. This stream may be likened unto the river by whose banks Petrarch loved to wander; inasmuch as it springs full grown from the foot of a great bare precipice. All around is tumbled rock. So, among the heaped and broken rocks of disappointed hopes and baffled attempts, this full, strong, and clear stream leaped forth triumphant.

For the greater part of mankind Jefferies is too full. They cannot absorb so much; they are more at their ease with the last century poets who use to talk vaguely of the perfumed flowers, the rustling leaves, the finny tribe, and the warbling of the birds in the bosky grove. It fatigues them to read of so much that they can never see for themselves; it irritates them,

perhaps, even to think that there is so much; they are more at home among their geraniums in the conservatory; they even call his style a cataloguing.

There is also another thing where Jefferies is outside the sympathies of the multitude. This solitary, who was never so happy as when he wandered alone upon the downs with no human creature in sight, is yet intensely human. All kinds of injustice, and especially social injustice, the grinding and robbery and oppression of the producer, the pride of caste and class, the pretensions of rank and the insolence of money—these things make him angry. Now, if there be one thing more lamentably sure and certain than another, it is that injustice does not make the average man angry. If money is to be made by injustice, he will be unjust. He will call his injustice, unless he covers and hides it up, the custom of the trade, and persuade himself that it is laudable and even Christian so to act. When another man speaks the truth about these injustices, he gets uncomfortable. Because, you see, he goes to church, and perhaps bears

a character for eminent piety. There were doubtless churchwardens and sidesmen among those who, fifty years ago, used to send the little children of six to work for fourteen hours in the dark coal-pit. Jefferies had lived so little in towns and among men that he did not know any sophistry of trade custom, and when he heard of these customs his soul flamed up. It is not a side of his character which often comes into view; but it comes often enough to irritate many excellent people who live in great comfort by the exertions of other people, and plume themselves mightily upon their virtues, hereditary or otherwise. Jefferies could never have called himself a Socialist; but he sympathized with that part of Socialism which claims for every man the full profit of the labour of his hands.

> "Dim woodlands made him wiser far
> Than those who thresh their barren thought
> With flails of knowledge dearly bought,
> Till all his soul shone like a star
> That flames at fringe of Heaven's bar,
> There breaks the surf of space unseen
> Against Hope's veil that lies between
> Love's future and the woes that are.

"His soul saw through the weary years—
Past war-bells' chimes and poor men's tears—
That day when Time shall bring to birth
(By many a heart whose hope seems vain,
And many a fight where Love slays Pain)
True Freedom, come to reign on earth."*

In thinking of Jefferies and the country life, one is continually tempted to compare him with Thoreau. There are some points of resemblance. Neither Thoreau nor Jefferies had a scientific training. I do not gather from any page in the works of the latter that he was a scientific botanist, entomologist, or ornithologist. Both were men of few wants and simple habits. Neither went to church, yet in the heart of each there was a profound sense of religion, which, in the case of Jefferies, took the form of a firm faith in the future destiny of the soul. Both men were impatient of authority and of imitation. Each desired to be self-sufficient. What Emerson says of Thoreau in respect of open air and exercise might have been written of Jefferies. "The length of his walk uniformly made the length

* These lines were communicated to me by the writer, Mr. H. H. von Sturmer, of Cambridge.

of his writing. If shut up in the house he could not write at all."

In both men there was to be observed a great strength of common-sense. And again, there was this other point common to both, that no college—I here imitate Emerson on Thoreau —ever offered either of them a diploma or a professor's chair: no academy made either man its corresponding secretary, its founder, or even its member. And the following passage, written by Emerson of Thoreau, might be equally well written, *mutatis mutandis*, of Jefferies:

"Thoreau dedicated his genius with such entire love to the fields, hills and waters of his native town, that he made them known and interesting to all reading Americans, and to people over the sea. The river on whose banks he was born and died he knew from its springs to its confluence with the Merrimack. He had made summer and winter observations on it for many years, and at every hour of the day and night. Every fact which occurs in the bed, on the banks, or in the air over it; the

fishes, and their spawning and nests, their manners, their food ; the shad-flies which fill the air on a certain evening once a year, and which are snapped at by the fishes so ravenously that many of these die of repletion ; the conical heaps of small stones on the river-shallows ; the huge nests of small fishes, one of which will sometimes overfill a cart ; the birds which frequent the stream, heron, duck, sheldrake, loon, osprey; the snake, muskrat, otter, woodchuck and fox, on the banks ; the turtle, frog, hyla, and cricket, which make the banks vocal—were all known to him, and, as it were, townsmen and fellow-creatures ; so that he felt an absurdity or violence in any narrative of one of these by itself apart, and still more of its dimensions on an inch-rule, or in the exhibition of its skeleton, or the specimen of a squirrel or a bird in brandy. He liked to speak of the manners of the river, as itself a lawful creature, yet with exactness, and always to an observed fact. As he knew the river, so the ponds in this region."

Again, though Thoreau was short of stature

and Jefferies tall, there is something similar in their faces: the lofty forehead; the full, serious eye; the large nose—these are features common to both. And to both was common—but Jefferies had, perhaps, the greater forbearance—a certain impatience with the common herd of mankind who know not, and care not for, Nature.

There is another passage on Thoreau by a younger writer,* which might just as well have been written, word for word, of Jefferies:

"The quality which we should call mystery in a painting, and which belongs so particularly to the aspect of the external world and to its influence upon our feelings, was one which he was never weary of attempting to reproduce in his books. The seeming significance of nature's appearances, their unchanging strangeness to the senses, and the thrilling response which they waken in the mind of man, continued to surprise and stimulate his

* Robert Louis Stevenson, "Men and Books: *Thoreau.*" Chatto and Windus, London.

spirits. It appeared to him, I think, that if we could only write near enough to the facts, and yet with no pedestrian calm, but ardently, we might transfer the glamour of reality direct upon our pages ; and that, if it were once thus captured and expressed, a new and instructive relation might appear between men's thoughts and the phenomena of nature. This was the eagle that he pursued all his life long, like a schoolboy with a butterfly net. Hear him to a friend : 'Let me suggest a theme for you—to state to yourself precisely and completely what that walk over the mountains amounted to for you, returning to this essay again and again until you are satisfied that all that was important in your experience is in it.'"

It was not until Jefferies had thoroughly mastered this lesson, and saturated himself with its spirit, that he began to write well. No one would believe that the same hand which wrote "The Scarlet Shawl" also wrote "The Pageant of Summer." I firmly believe that it is not until a man obtains the great gift of beautiful thought that he can even begin

to understand the beauty of style. To some such thoughts come early; to others, late. When Jefferies left men for the fields, and not till then, his mind became every day more and more charged with beauty of thought, and his style grew correspondingly day by day more charged with beauty. This beauty of thought grows in him out of the intense love, the passionate love, which he has for everything in Nature: it is the child of that love: it is Nature's reward for that love: he loves not only flowers and trees, but every flower, every tree; he is even contented to look upon the same trees, the same hedges filled with flowers every day:

"I do not want change," he says; "I want the same old and loved things, the same wild-flowers, the same trees and soft ash-green; the turtle-doves, the blackbirds, the coloured yellowhammer sing, sing, singing so long as there is light to cast a shadow on the dial, for such is the measure of his song: and I want them in the same place. Let me find them morning after morning, the starry-white petals

radiating, striving upwards to their ideal. Let me see the idle shadows resting on the white dust; let me hear the humble-bees, and stay to look down on the rich dandelion disk. Let me see the very thistles opening their great crowns—I should miss the thistles; the reed-grasses hiding the moorhen; the bryony bine, at first crudely ambitious and lifted by force of youthful sap straight above the hedgerow to sink of its own weight presently and progress with crafty tendrils; swifts shot through the air with outstretched wings like crescent-headed shaftless arrows darted from the clouds; the chaffinch with a feather in her bill; all the living staircase of the spring, step by step, upwards to the great gallery of the summer—let me watch the same succession year by year."

Therefore, and in return for this great love, Nature rewarded him. Jefferies began, as Thoreau recommends, by writing down everything that he saw: he presently arrived at an inconceivable power of minute observation. Pages might be quoted to show this wonderful

closeness. It is indeed the first, but not the finest, characteristic of Jefferies. It was the point which most struck the critic in the "Game-keeper at Home." But it is not the point which most strikes the reader in his later and more delicate work. Here the things which he loves speak to him: they reply to his questioning; they support and raise his soul. "So it has ever been to me," he says, "by day or by night, summer or winter: beneath trees the heart feels nearer to that depth of life which the far sky means. The rest of spirit found only in beauty, ideal and pure, comes there because the distance seems within touch of thought."

In Jefferies' later books the whole of the country life of the nineteenth century will be found displayed down to every detail. The life of the farmer is there; the life of the labourer; the life of the gamekeeper; the life of the women who work in the fields, and of those who work at home. If this were all, he would well deserve the gratitude of the English-speaking race, because in any generation to get so great a part of life described

truthfully is an enormous boon. But it is far from being the most considerable part of his work. He revealed Nature in her works and ways; the flowers and the fields ; the wild English creatures ; the hedges and the streams ; the wood and coppice. He told what may be seen everywhere by those who have eyes to see. He worked his way, as we have seen, to this point. And, again, if this were all, he would well deserve the gratitude which we willingly accord to a White of Selborne. But this is not all. For next he took the step—the vast step—across the chasm which separates the poetic from the vulgar mind, and began to clothe the real with the colours and glamour of the unreal; to write down the response of the soul to the phenomena of nature : to interpret the voice of Nature speaking to the soul. Unto this last. And then he died ; his work, which might have gone on for ever, cut off almost at the commencement.

I desire in this chapter to show how Jefferies paints the country life; to show him in his minuteness and fidelity first, and in his higher flights afterwards. Even to those who know

Jefferies there will be something new in reading these scenes again. To those who know him not, and yet can feel beauty and truth and simplicity—things so rare, so very rare—these scenes will be like the entrance to some unknown gallery filled with pictures exquisite, touching and tender.

I select, first, a specimen of his early style. He is speaking of the provision made by the oak for the creatures of the wood :

"It is curious to note the number of creatures to whom the oak furnishes food. The jays, for instance, are now visiting them for acorns ; in the summer they fluttered round the then green branches for the chafers, and in the evenings the fern owls or goat-suckers wheeled about the verge for these and for moths. Rooks come to the oaks in crowds for the acorns ; wood-pigeons are even more fond of them, and from their crops quite a handful may sometimes be taken when shot in the trees.

"They will carry off at once as many acorns as old-fashioned economical farmers used to walk about with in their pockets, 'chucking'

them one, two, or three at a time to the pigs in the stye as a *bonne bouche* and an encouragement to fatten well. Never was there such a bird to eat as the wood-pigeon. Pheasants roam out from the preserves after the same fruit, and no arts can retain them at acorn time. Swine are let run out about the hedgerows to help themselves. Mice pick up the acorns that fall, and hide them for winter use, and squirrels select the best.

"If there is a decaying bough, or, more particularly, one that has been sawn off, it slowly decays into a hollow, and will remain in that state for years, the resort of endless woodlice, snapped up by insect-eating birds. Down from the branches in spring there descend long, slender threads, like gossamer, with a caterpillar at the end of each—the insect-eating birds decimate these. So that in various ways the oaks give more food to the birds than any other tree. Where there are oaks there are sure to be plenty of birds."

After reading this, turn to the following, in quite a different style, from the same

volume. Could the same man, one asks, have written both these passages?

"The waves coming round the promontory before the west wind still give the idea of a flowing stream, as they did in Homer's days. Here beneath the cliff, standing where beach and sand meet, it is still; the wind passes six hundred feet overhead. But yonder, every larger wave rolling before the breeze breaks over the rocks; a white line of spray rushes along them, gleaming in the sunshine; for a moment the dark rock-wall disappears, till the spray sinks.

"The sea seems higher than the spot where I stand, its surface on a higher level—raised like a green mound—as if it could burst in and occupy the space up to the foot of the cliff in a moment. It will not do so, I know; but there is an infinite possibility about the sea; it may do what it is not recorded to have done. It is not to be ordered, it may overleap the bounds human observation has fixed for it. It has a potency unfathomable. There is still something in it not quite grasped and under-

stood—something still to be discovered—a mystery.

"So the white spray rushes along the low broken wall of rocks, the sun gleams on the flying fragments of the wave, again it sinks, and the rhythmic motion holds the mind, as an invisible force holds back the tide. A faith of expectancy, a sense that something may drift up from the unknown, a large belief in the unseen resources of the endless space out yonder, soothes the mind with dreamy hope.

"The little rules and little experiences, all the petty ways of narrow life, are shut off behind by the ponderous and impassable cliff; as if we had dwelt in the dim light of a cave, but coming out at last to look at the sun, a great stone had fallen and closed the entrance, so that there was no return to the shadow. The impassable precipice shuts off our former selves of yesterday, forcing us to look out over the sea only, or up to the deeper heaven.

"These breadths draw out the soul; we feel that we have wider thoughts than we knew; the soul has been living, as it were, in a nut-shell, all unaware of its own power, and now

suddenly finds freedom in the sun and the sky. Straight, as if sawn down from turf to beach, the cliff shuts off the human world, for the sea knows no time and no era; you cannot tell what century it is from the face of the sea. A Roman trireme suddenly rounding the white edge-line of chalk, borne on wind and oar from the Isle of Wight towards the gray castle at Pevensey (already old in olden days), would not seem strange. What wonder could surprise us coming from the wonderful sea?"

Here, again, is a specimen of what has been called his "cataloguing." He describes a hedge-row. Cataloguing! Yes. But was ever observation more minute?

"A wild 'plum,' or bullace, grew in one place; the plum about twice the size of a sloe, with a bloom upon the skin like the cultivated fruit, but lacking its sweetness. Yet there was a distinct difference of taste: the 'plum' had not got the extreme harshness of the sloe. A quantity of dogwood occupied a corner; in summer it bore a pleasing flower; in the

autumn, after the black berries appeared upon it, the leaves became a rich bronze colour, and some when the first frosts touched them, curled up at the edge and turned crimson. There were two or three guelder-rose bushes—the wild shrub—which were covered in June with white bloom; not in snowy balls like the garden variety, but flat and circular, the florets at the edge of the circle often whitest, and those in the centre greenish. In autumn the slender boughs were weighed down with heavy bunches of large purplish berries, so full of red juice as to appear on the point of bursting. As these soon disappeared they were doubtless eaten by birds.

"Besides the hawthorn and briar there were several species of willow—the snake-skin willow, so called because it sheds its bark; the 'snap-willow,' which is so brittle that every gale breaks off its feeble twigs, and pollards. One of these, hollow and old, had upon its top a crowd of parasites. A bramble had taken root there, and hung over the side; a small currant-bush grew freely—both, no doubt, unwittingly planted by birds—and

finally the bines of the noxious bitter-sweet or nightshade, starting from the decayed wood, supported themselves among the willow-branches, and in autumn were bright with red berries. Ash-stoles, the buds on whose boughs in spring are hidden under black sheaths; nut-tree stoles, with ever-welcome nuts—always stolen here, but on the downs, where they are plentiful, staying till they fall; young oak growing up from the butt of a felled tree. On these oak-twigs sometimes, besides the ordinary round galls, there may be found another gall, larger, and formed, as it were, of green scales one above the other.

"Where shall we find in the artificial and, to my thinking, tasteless pleasure-grounds of modern houses so beautiful a shrubbery as this old hedgerow? Nor were evergreens wanting, for the ivy grew thickly, and there was one holly bush—not more, for the soil was not affected by holly. The tall cow-parsnip or 'gicks' rose up through the bushes; the great hollow stem of the angelica grew at the edge of the field, on the verge of the grass, but still sheltered by the brambles. Some reeds early

in spring thrust up their slender green tubes, tipped with two spear-like leaves. The reed varies in height according to the position in which it grows. If the hedge has been cut it does not reach higher than four or five feet ; when it springs from a deep, hollow corner, or with bushes to draw it up, you can hardly touch its tip with your walking-stick. The leaders of the black bryony, lifting themselves above the bushes, and having just there nothing to cling to, twist around each other, and two bines thus find mutual support where one alone would fall of its own weight.

"In the watery places the sedges send up their dark flowers, dusted with light yellow pollen, rising above the triangular stem with its narrow, ribbed leaf. The reed-sparrow or bunting sits upon the spray over the ditch with its carex grass and rushes ; he is a graceful bird, with a crown of glossy black. Hops climb the ash and hang their clusters, which impart an aromatic scent to the hand that plucks them ; broad burdock leaves, which the mouchers put on the top of their baskets to shield their freshly gathered watercresses from

the sunshine ; creeping avens, with buttercup-like flowers and long stems that straggle across the ditch, and in autumn are tipped with a small ball of soft spines ; mints, strong-scented and unmistakable ; yarrow, white and sometimes a little lilac, whose flower is perhaps almost the last that the bee visits. In the middle of October I have seen a wild bee on a last stray yarrow."

Again we are in the forest, and again 'cataloguing' :

"The beechnuts are already falling in the forest, and the swine are beginning to search for them while yet the harvest lingers. The nuts are formed by midsummer, and now, the husk opening, the brown angular kernel drops out. Many of the husks fall, too ; others remain on the branches till next spring. Under the beeches the ground is strewn with the mast, as hard almost to walk on as pebbles. Rude and uncouth as swine are in themselves, somehow they look different under trees. The brown leaves amid which they rout, and the brown-tinted fern behind, lend something of

their colour and smooth away their ungainliness. Snorting as they work with very eagerness of appetite, they are almost wild, approaching in a measure to their ancestors, the savage boars. Under the trees the imagination plays unchecked, and calls up the past as if yew bow and broad arrow were still in the hunter's hands. So little is changed since then. The deer are here still. Sit down on the root of this oak (thinly covered with moss), and on that very spot it is quite possible a knight fresh home from the Crusades may have rested and feasted his eyes on the lovely green glades of his own unsurpassed England. The oak was there then, young and strong; it is here now, ancient, but sturdy. Rarely do you see an oak fall of itself. It decays to the last stump; it does not fall. The sounds are the same—the tap as a ripe acorn drops, the rustle of a leaf which comes down slowly, the quick rushes of mice playing in the fern. A movement at one side attracts the glance, and there is a squirrel darting about. There is another at the very top of the beech yonder, out on the boughs, nibbling the nuts. A

brown spot a long distance down the glade suddenly moves, and thereby shows itself to be a rabbit. The bellowing sound that comes now and then is from the stags, which are preparing to fight. The swine snort, and the mast and leaves rustle as they thrust them aside. So little is changed: these are the same sounds and the same movements, just as in the olden time.

"The soft autumn sunshine, shorn of summer glare, lights up with colour the fern, the fronds of which are yellow and brown, the leaves, the gray grass, and hawthorn sprays already turned. It seems as if the early morning's mists have the power of tinting leaf and fern, for so soon as they commence the green hues begin to disappear. There are swathes of fern yonder, cut down like grass or corn, the harvest of the forest. It will be used for litter and for thatching sheds. The yellow stalks—the stubble—will turn brown and wither through the winter, till the strong spring shoot comes up and the anemones flower. Though the sunbeams reach the ground here, half the green glade is in shadow, and for one step that

you walk in sunlight ten are in shade. Thus, partly concealed in full day, the forest always contains a mystery. The idea that there may be something in the dim arches held up by the round columns of the beeches lures the footsteps onwards. Something must have been lately in the circle under the oak where the fern and bushes remain at a distance and wall in a lawn of green. There is nothing on the grass but the upheld leaves that have dropped, no mark of any creature, but this is not decisive; if there are no physical signs, there is a feeling that the shadow is not vacant. In the thickets, perhaps—the shadowy thickets with front of thorn—it has taken refuge and eluded us. Still onward the shadows lead us in vain but pleasant chase."

Next let us rise with the rustic and follow him as he begins his day's work:

"The pale beams of the waning moon still cast a shadow of the cottage, when the labourer rises from his heavy sleep on a winter's morning. Often he huddles on his things and slips his feet into his thick 'water-tights'—which

are stiff and hard, having been wet over-night —by no other light than this. If the household is comparatively well managed, however, he strikes a match, and his 'dip' shows at the window. But he generally prefers to save a candle, and clatters down the narrow steep stairs in the semi-darkness, takes a piece of bread and cheese, and steps forth into the sharp air. The cabbages in the garden he notes are covered with white frost, so is the grass in the fields, and the footpath is hard under foot. In the furrows is a little ice—white because the water has shrunk from beneath it, leaving it hollow—and on the stile is a crust of rime, cold to the touch, which he brushes off in getting over. Overhead the sky is clear—cloudless but pale—and the stars, though not yet fading, have lost the brilliant glitter of midnight. Then, in all their glory, the idea of their globular shape is easily accepted; but in the morning, just as the dawn is breaking, the absence of glitter conveys the impression of flatness—circular rather than globular. But yonder, over the elms, above the cowpens, the great morning star has risen,

shining far brighter, in proportion, than the moon; an intensely clear metallic light—like incandescent silver.

"The shadows of the trees on the frosted ground are dull. As the footpath winds by the hedge the noise of his footstep startles the blackbird roosting in the bushes, and he bustles out and flies across the field. There is more rime on the posts and rails around the rickyard, and the thatch on the haystack is white with it in places. He draws out the broad hay-knife—a vast blade, wide at the handle, the edge gradually curving to a point—and then searches for the rubber or whetstone, stuck somewhere in the side of the rick. At the first sound of the stone upon the steel the cattle in the adjoining yard and sheds utter a few low 'moos,' and there is a stir among them. Mounting the ladder, he forces the knife with both hands into the hay, making a square cut which bends outwards, opening from the main mass till it appears on the point of parting and letting him fall with it to the ground. But long practice has taught him how to balance himself half on the ladder, half on the

hay. Presently, with a truss unbound and loose on his head, he enters the yard, and passes from crib to crib, leaving a little here and a little there. For if he fills one first there will be quarrelling among the cows, and besides, if the crib is too liberally filled, they will pull it out and tread it under foot."

Here is the portrait from his book of the Red Deer:

"There is no more beautiful creature than a stag in his pride of antler, his coat of ruddy gold, his grace of form and motion. He seems the natural owner of the ferny coombes, the oak woods, the broad slopes of heather. They belong to him, and he steps upon the sward in lordly mastership. The land is his, and the hills; the sweet streams and rocky glens. He is infinitely more natural than the cattle and sheep that have strayed into his domains. For some inexplicable reason, although they, too, are in reality natural, when he is present they look as if they had been put there, and were kept

there by artificial means. They do not, as painters say, shade in with the colours and shape of the landscape. He is as natural as an oak, or a fern, or a rock itself. He is earth-born, autochthon, and holds possession by descent. Utterly scorning control, the walls and hedges are nothing to him; he roams where he chooses, as fancy leads, and gathers the food that pleases him. Pillaging the crops, and claiming his dues from the orchards and gardens, he exercises his ancient feudal rights, indifferent to the laws of house-people. Disturb him in his wild stronghold of oak-wood or heather, and as he yields to force, still he stops and looks back proudly. He is slain, but never conquered. He will not cross with the tame park deer; proud as a Spanish noble, he disdains the fallow deer, and breeds only with his own race. But it is chiefly because of his singular adaptation and fitness to the places where he is found that he obtains our sympathy. The branching antlers accord so well with the deep, shadowy boughs and the broad fronds of the brake; the golden red of his coat fits to the foxglove, the purple

heather, and later on to the orange and red of the beech; his easy-bounding motion springs from the elastic sward; his limbs climb the steep hill as if it were level; his speed covers the distance, and he goes from place to place as the wind. He not only lives in the wild, wild woods and moors, he grows out of them as the oak grows from the ground. The noble stag, in his pride of antler, is lord and monarch of all the creatures left in English forests and on English hills."

What do we purblind mortals see when we walk through a wood in winter? Listen to what Jefferies saw in January, when the woods are at their very brownest, and all Nature seems wrapped in winter sleep:

"Some little green stays on the mounds where the rabbits creep and nibble the grasses. Cinquefoil remains green though faded, and wild parsley the freshest looking of all; plantain leaves are found under shelter of brambles, and the dumb nettles, though the old stalks are dead, have living leaves at the ground. Gray-veined ivy trails along, here and there is

a frond of hart's-tongue fern, though withered at the tip, and greenish-gray lichen grows on the exposed stumps of trees. These together give a green tint to the mound, which is not so utterly devoid of colour as the season of the year might indicate. Where they fail, brown brake fern fills the spaces between the brambles; and in a moist spot the bunches of rushes are composed half of dry stalks, and half of green. Stems of willow-herb, four feet high, still stand, and tiny long-tailed tits perch sideways on them. Above, on the bank, another species of willow-herb has died down to a short stalk, from which springs a living branch, and at its end is one pink flower. A dandelion is opening on the same sheltered bank; farther on the gorse is sprinkled with golden spots of bloom. A flock of greenfinches starts from the bushes, and their colour shows against the ruddy wands of the osier-bed over which they fly. The path winds round the edge of the wood, where a waggon-track goes up the hill; it is deeply grooved at the foot of the hill. These tracks wear deeply into the chalk just where the ascent begins. The chalk

adheres to the shoes like mortar, and for some time after one has left it each footstep leaves a white mark on the turf. On the ridge the low trees and bushes have an outline like the flame of a candle in a draught—the wind has blown them till they have grown fixed in that shape. In an oak across the ploughed field a flock of wood-pigeons have settled ; on the furrows there are chaffinches, and larks rise and float a few yards farther away. The snow has ceased, and though there is no wind on the surface, the clouds high above have opened somewhat, not sufficient for the sun to shine, but to prolong the already closing afternoon a few minutes. If the sun shines to-morrow morning the lark will soar and sing, though it is January, and the quick note of the chaffinch will be heard as he perches on the little branches projecting from the trunks of trees below the great boughs. Thrushes sing every mild day in December and January, entirely irrespective of the season, also before rain."

Here is Cider-land :

"The Lower Path, after stile and hedge and

elm, and grass that glows with golden buttercups, quietly leaves the side of the double mounds and goes straight through the orchards. There are fewer flowers under the trees, and the grass grows so long and rank that it has already fallen aslant of its own weight. It is choked, too, by masses of clogweed, that springs up profusely over the sight of old foundations; so that here ancient masonry may be hidden under the earth. Indeed, these orchards are a survival from the days when the monks laboured in vineyard and garden, and mayhap even of earlier times. When once a locality has got into the habit of growing a certain crop, it continues to produce it for century after century; and thus there are villages famous for apple or pear or cherry, while the district at large is not at all given to such culture.

"The trunks of the trees succeed each other in endless ranks, like columns that support the most beautiful roof of pink and white. Here the bloom is rosy, there white prevails: the young green is hidden under the petals that are far more numerous than leaves, or even than leaves will be. Though the path really

is in shadow as the branches shut out the sun, yet it seems brighter here than in the open, as if the place were illuminated by a million tiny lamps shedding the softest lustre. The light is reflected and apparently increased by the countless flowers overhead.

"The forest of bloom extends acre after acre, and only ceases where hedges divide, to commence again beyond the boundary. A wicket-gate, all green with a film of vegetation over the decaying wood, opens under the very eaves of a cottage, and the path goes by the door—across a narrow meadow where deep and broad trenches, green now, show where ancient stews or fishponds existed, and then through a farmyard into a lane. Tall poplars rise on either hand, but there seem to be no houses; they stand in fact a field's breadth back from the lane, and are approached by footpaths that every few yards necessitate a stile in the hedge.

"When a low thatched farmhouse does abut upon the way, the blank white wall of the rear part faces the road, and the front door opens on precisely the other side. Hard by is a row of

beehives. Though the modern hives are at once more economical and humane, they have not the old associations that cling about the straw domes topped with broken earthenware to shoot off the heavy downfall of a thunder-storm.

"Everywhere the apple-bloom; the hum of bees; children sitting on the green beside the road, their laps full of flowers; the song of finches; and the low murmur of water that glides over flint and stone so shadowed by plants and grasses that the sunbeams cannot reach and glisten on it. Thus the straggling flower-strewn village stretches along beneath the hill and rises up the slope, and the swallows wheel and twitter over the gables where are their hereditary nesting-places. The lane ends on a broad dusty road, and, opposite, a quiet thatched house of the larger sort stands, endways to the street, with an open pitching before the windows. There, too, the swallows' nests are crowded under the eaves, flowers are trained against the wall, and in the garden stand the same beautiful apple-trees."

Let us witness, with him, the dawn of a summer day :

" The star went on. In the meadows of the vale far away doubtless there were sounds of the night. On the hills it was absolute silence —profound rest. They slept peacefully, and the moon rose to the meridian. The pale white glow on the northern horizon slipped towards the east. After a while a change came over the night. The hills and coombes became gray and more distinct, the sky lighter, the stars faint, the moon that had been ruddy became yellow, and then almost white.

" Yet a little while, and one by one the larks arose from the grass, and first twittering and vibrating their brown wings just above the hawthorn bushes, presently breasted the aërial ascent, and sang at ' Heaven's Gate.'

" Geoffrey awoke and leaned upon his arm ; his first thought was of Margaret, and he looked towards the copse. All was still ; then in the dawn the strangeness of that hoary relic of the past sheltering so lovely a form came home to him. Next he gazed eastwards.

"There a great low bank, a black wall of cloud, was rising rapidly, extending on either hand, growing momentarily broader, darker, threatening to cover the sky. He watched it come up swiftly, and saw that as it neared it became lighter in colour, first gray, then white. It was the morning mist driven along before the breeze, whose breath had not reached him yet. In a few minutes the wall of vapour passed over him as the waters rolled over Pharaoh. A puff of wind blew his hair back from his forehead, then another and another; presently a steady breeze, cool and refreshing. The mist drove rapidly along; after awhile gaps appeared overhead, and through these he saw broad spaces of blue sky, the colour growing and deepening. The gaps widened, the mist became thinner; then this, the first wave of vapour, was gone, creeping up the hillside behind him like the rearguard of an army.

"Out from the last fringe of mist shone a great white globe. Like molten silver, glowing with a lusciousness of light, soft and yet brilliant, so large and bright and seemingly so

near—but just above the ridge yonder—shining with heavenly splendour in the very dayspring. He knew Eosphoros, the Light-Bringer, the morning star of hope and joy and love, and his heart went out towards the beauty and the glory of it. Under him the broad bosom of the earth seemed to breathe instinct with life, bearing him up, and from the azure ether came the wind, filling his chest with the vigour of the young day.

"The azure ether—yes, and more than that! Who that has seen it can forget the wondrous beauty of the summer morning's sky? It is blue—it is sapphire—it is like the eye of a lovely woman. A rich purple shines through it; no painter ever approached the colour of it, no Titian or other, none from the beginning. Not even the golden flesh of Rubens' women, through the veins in whose limbs a sunlight pulses in lieu of blood shining behind the tissues, can equal the hues that glow behind the blue.

"The East flamed out at last. Pencilled streaks of cloud high in the dome shone red. An orange light rose up and spread about the

horizon, then turned crimson, and the upper edge of the sun's disk lifted itself over the hill. A swift beam of light shot like an arrow towards him, and the hawthorn bush obeyed with instant shadow; it passed beyond him over the green plain, up the ridge and away. The great orb, quivering with golden flames, looked forth upon the world."

The finest of all the papers written by Jefferies—as I have already said—is that called "The Pageant of Summer." It came out in *Longman's Magazine*. I know nothing in the English language finer, whether for the sustained style or for the elevation of thought which fills it. Herein Jefferies surpassed himself as well as all other writers who have written upon Nature. This is perhaps because he fills the "Pageant" which he describes with human love and human regrets. Without the life and presence of man, what is the beauty of Nature worth? I should like to quote it all—nay, to those who have read it again and again, the words live in the memory like the lines of Wordsworth's "Ode to Immor-

tality," and like them they fill the heart with tenderness and the eyes with tears. It is published in the last but one of his books, "The Life of the Fields," which everybody should make haste to possess, if only for this one paper. It opens quietly—with the rushes:

"Green rushes, long and thick, standing up above the edge of the ditch, told the hour of the year as distinctly as the shadow on the dial the hour of the day. Green and thick and sappy to the touch, they felt like summer, soft and elastic, as if full of life, mere rushes though they were. On the fingers they left a green scent; rushes have a separate scent of green, so, too, have ferns, very different to that of grass or leaves. Rising from brown sheaths, the tall stems enlarged a little in the middle, like classical columns, and heavy with their sap and freshness, leaned against the hawthorn sprays. From the earth they had drawn its moisture, and made the ditch dry; some of the sweetness of the air had entered into their fibres, and the rushes—the common rushes—were full of beautiful summer. The white

pollen of early grasses growing on the edge was dusted from them each time the hawthorn boughs were shaken by a thrush. These lower sprays came down in among the grass, and leaves and grass-blades touched.

"It was between the May and the June roses. The may-bloom had fallen, and among the hawthorn boughs were the little green bunches that would feed the redwings in autumn. High up the briars had climbed, straight and towering while there was a thorn, or an ash sapling, or a yellow-green willow to uphold them, and then curving over towards the meadow. The buds were on them, but not yet open; it was between the may and the rose.

"As the wind, wandering over the sea, takes from each wave an invisible portion, and brings to those on shore the ethereal essence of ocean, so the air lingering among the woods and hedges—green waves and billows—became full of fine atoms of summer. Swept from notched hawthorn-leaves, broad-topped oak-leaves, narrow ash sprays and oval willows; from vast elm cliffs and sharp-taloned brambles

under; brushed from the waving grasses and stiffening corn, the dust of the sunshine was borne along and breathed. Steeped in flower and pollen to the music of bees and birds, the stream of the atmosphere became a living thing. It was life to breathe it, for the air itself was life. The strength of the earth went up through the leaves into the wind. Fed thus on the food of the Immortals, the heart opened to the width and depth of the summer —to the broad horizon afar, down to the minutest creature in the grass, up to the highest swallow. Winter shows us Matter in its dead form, like the primary rocks, like granite and basalt—clear but cold and frozen crystal. Summer shows us Matter changing into life, sap rising from the earth through a million tubes, the alchemic power of light entering the solid oak; and see! it bursts forth in countless leaves. Living things leap in the grass, living things drift upon the air, living things are coming forth to breathe in every hawthorn bush. No longer does the immense weight of Matter—the dead, the crystallized—press ponderously on the think-

ing mind. The whole office of Matter is to feed life—to feed the green rushes, and the roses that are about to be; to feed the swallows above, and us that wander beneath them. So much greater is this green and common rush than all the Alps.

"Fanning so swiftly, the wasp's wings are but just visible as he passes; did he pause, the light would be apparent through their texture. On the wings of the dragon-fly as he hovers an instant before he darts there is a prismatic gleam. These wing textures are even more delicate than the minute filaments on a swallow's quill, more delicate than the pollen of a flower. They are formed of matter indeed, but how exquisitely it is resolved into the means and organs of life! Though not often consciously recognised, perhaps this is the great pleasure of summer, to watch the earth, the dead particles, resolving themselves into the living case of life, to see the seed-leaf push aside the clod and become by degrees the perfumed flower. From the tiny mottled egg come the wings that by-and-by shall pass the immense sea. It is in this marvellous trans-

formation of clods and cold matter into living things that the joy and the hope of summer reside. Every blade of grass, each leaf, each separate floret and petal, is an inscription speaking of hope. Consider the grasses and the oaks, the swallows, the sweet blue butterfly—they are one and all a sign and token showing before our eyes earth made into life. So that my hope becomes as broad as the horizon afar, reiterated by every leaf, sung on every bough, reflected in the gleam of every flower. There is so much for us yet to come, so much to be gathered, and enjoyed. Not for you or me, now, but for our race, who will ultimately use this magical secret for their happiness. Earth holds secrets enough to give them the life of the fabled Immortals. My heart is fixed firm and stable in the belief that ultimately the sunshine and the summer, the flowers and the azure sky, shall become, as it were, interwoven into man's existence. He shall take from all their beauty and enjoy their glory. Hence it is that a flower is to me so much more than stalk and petals. When I look in the glass I see that every line in my face means pessimism ;

but in spite of my face—that is my experience —I remain an optimist. Time with an unsteady hand has etched thin crooked lines, and, deepening the hollows, has cast the original expression into shadow. Pain and sorrow flow over us with little ceasing, as the sea-hoofs beat on the beach. Let us not look at ourselves but onwards, and take strength from the leaf and the signs of the field. He is indeed despicable who cannot look onwards to the ideal life of man. Not to do so is to deny our birthright of mind. . . .

"It is the patient humble-bee that goes down into the forest of the mowing-grass. If entangled, the humble-bee climbs up a sorrel stem and takes wing, without any sign of annoyance. His broad back with tawny bar buoyantly glides over the golden buttercups. He hums to himself as he goes, so happy is he. He knows no skep, no cunning work in glass receives his labour, no artificial saccharine aids him when the beams of the sun are cold, there is no step to his house that he may alight in comfort; the way is not made clear for him that he may start straight for the flowers, nor

are any sown for him. He has no shelter if the storm descends suddenly ; he has no dome of twisted straw well thatched and tiled to retreat to. The butcher-bird, with a beak like a crooked iron nail, drives him to the ground, and leaves him pierced with a thorn ; but no hail of shot revenges his tortures. The grass stiffens at nightfall (in autumn) and he must creep where he may, if possibly he may escape the frost. No one cares for the humble-bee. But down to the flowering nettle in the mossy-sided ditch, up into the tall elm, winding in and out and round the branched buttercups, along the banks of the brook, far inside the deepest wood, away he wanders and despises nothing. His nest is under the rough grasses and the mosses of the mound, a mere tunnel beneath the fibres and matted surface. The hawthorn overhangs it, the fern grows by, red mice rustle past. . . .

"All the procession of living and growing things passes. The grass stands up taller and still taller, the sheaths open, and the stalk arises, the pollen clings till the breeze sweeps it. The bees rush past, and the resolute

wasps; the humble-bees, whose weight swings them along. About the oaks and maples the brown chafers swarm, and the fern-owls at dusk, and the blackbirds and jays by day, cannot reduce their legions while they last. Yellow butterflies, and white, broad red admirals, and sweet blues; think of the kingdom of flowers which is theirs! Heavy moths burring at the edge of the copse; green, and red, and gold flies: gnats, like smoke, around the tree-tops; midges so thick over the brook, as if you could haul a netful; tiny leaping creatures in the grass; bronze beetles across the path; blue dragonflies pondering on cool leaves of water-plantain. Blue jays flitting, a magpie drooping across from elm to elm; young rooks that have escaped the hostile shot blundering up into the branches; missel thrushes leading their fledglings, already strong on the wing, from field to field. An egg here on the sward dropped by a starling; a red ladybird creeping, tortoise-like, up a green fern frond. Finches undulating through the air, shooting themselves with closed wings, and linnets happy with their young. . . .

"Straight go the white petals to the heart; straight the mind's glance goes back to how many other pageants of summer in old times! When perchance the sunny days were even more sunny; when the stilly oaks were full of mystery, lurking like the Druid's mistletoe in the midst of their mighty branches. A glamour in the heart came back to it again from every flower; as the sunshine was reflected from them, so the feeling in the heart returned tenfold. To the dreamy summer haze love gave a deep enchantment, the colours were fairer, the blue more lovely in the lucid sky. Each leaf finer, and the gross earth enamelled beneath the feet. A sweet breath on the air, a soft warm hand in the touch of the sunshine, a glance in the gleam of the rippled waters, a whisper in the dance of the shadows. The ethereal haze lifted the heavy oaks and they were buoyant on the mead, the rugged bark was chastened and no longer rough, each slender flower beneath them again refined. There was a presence everywhere though unseen, on the open hills, and not shut out under the dark pines. Dear were the June

roses then because for another gathered. Yet even dearer now with so many years as it were upon the petals ; all the days that have been before, all the heart-throbs, all our hopes lie in this opened bud. Let not the eyes grow dim, look not back but forward ; the soul must uphold itself like the sun. Let us labour to make the heart grow larger as we become older, as the spreading oak gives more shelter. That we could but take to the soul some of the greatness and the beauty of the summer !

" I cannot leave it ; I must stay under the old tree in the midst of the long grass, the luxury of the leaves, and the song in the very air. I seem as if I could feel all the glowing life the sunshine gives and the south wind calls to being. The endless grass, the endless leaves, the immense strength of the oak expanding, the unalloyed joy of finch and blackbird ; from all of them I receive a little. Each gives me something of the pure joy they gather for themselves. In the blackbird's melody one note is mine ; in the dance of the leaf shadows the formed maze is for me, though

the motion is theirs; the flowers with a thousand faces have collected the kisses of the morning. Feeling with them, I receive some, at least, of their fulness of life. Never could I have enough; never stay long enough—whether here or whether lying on the shorter sward under the sweeping and graceful birches, or on the thyme-scented hills. Hour after hour, and still not enough. Or walking the footpath was never long enough, or my strength sufficient to endure till the mind was weary. The exceeding beauty of the earth, in her splendour of life, yields a new thought with every petal. The hours when the mind is absorbed by beauty are the only hours when we really live, so that the longer we can stay among these things so much the more is snatched from inevitable Time. Let the shadow advance upon the dial—I can watch it with equanimity while it is there to be watched. It is only when the shadow is *not* there, when the clouds of winter cover it, that the dial is terrible. The invisible shadow goes on and steals from us. But now, while I can see the shadow of the tree and watch it slowly

gliding along the surface of the grass, it is mine. These are the only hours that are not wasted—these hours that absorb the soul and fill it with beauty. This is real life, and all else is illusion, or mere endurance. Does this reverie of flowers and waterfall and song form an ideal, a human ideal, in the mind? It does; much the same ideal that Phidias sculptured of man and woman filled with a godlike sense of the violet fields of Greece, beautiful beyond thought, calm as my turtle-dove before the lurid lightning of the unknown. To be beautiful and to be calm, without mental fear, is the ideal of nature. If I cannot achieve it, at least I can think it."

May we not say indeed, that never any man has heretofore spoken of Nature as this man speaks? He has given new colours to the field and hedge; he has filled them with a beauty which we never thought to find there; he has shown in them more riches, more variety, more fulness, more wisdom, more Divine order than we common men ever looked for or dreamed of. He has taught us to look

around us with new eyes; he has removed our blindness; it is a new world that he has given to us. What, what shall we say—what can we say—to show our gratitude towards one who has conferred these wonderful gifts upon his fellow-men?

CHAPTER X.

"THE STORY OF MY HEART."

In the history of literature one happens, from time to time, upon a book which has been written because the author had no choice but to write it. He was compelled by hidden forces to write it. There was no rest for him, day or night, so soon as the book was complete in his mind, until he sat down to write it. And then he wrote it at a white heat. For eighteen years, Jefferies says, he pondered over this book—he means, that he brooded over these and cognate subjects from the time of adolescence. At last his mind was full, and then —but not till then—he wrote it.

Those who have not read it must understand at the outset that it is the book of one who dares to question for himself on the most im-

portant subject which can occupy the mind. To some men—very young men especially—it seems an easy thing to question and to go on following the questions to their logical end. An older man knows better; he has learned, perhaps by his own experience, that to carry on unto the end such an inquiry, fearless of whither it may lead, is an act requiring very great courage, clearness and strength of mind, and carelessness of other men's opinion. It is, in fact, an act which to begin and to carry through is beyond the courage and the mental powers of most. I do not mean the so-called intellectual process gone through by every young man who takes up the common carping and girding at received forms of religion, and boldly declares among an admiring circle that he renounces them all—I mean a long, patient, and wholly reverent inquiry by whatever line or lines may be possible to a man. For it must not be forgotten that, though there are many lines of independent research and inquiry, there are few men to whom even one is actually possible. This, however, we do not openly acknowledge; every person, how-

ever illiterate and untrained, considers himself, not only free, but also qualified, to be an advocate, or an opponent, of religion. Freedom of thought is so great a thing that one would not have it otherwise. As for the lines of inquiry, scientific men, of whom there are few, apply scientific methods to certain books held sacred by the Church, with whatever results may happen; some scientific men, after this research, find that they can remain Christians, others resigning, at least, the orthodox form of that faith. Scholars of language, mythology, Oriental antiquities, of whom also there are comparatively few, may approach the subject by these lines. Others, like the late Mr. Cotter Morison, the like of whom are rare, may consider the subject in relation to the history, development, and proved effect of certain doctrines upon humanity. Others, again, assuming that the pretensions of priests essentially belong to the Christian religion, may compare these pretensions with those of other and older religions. Again, the difficulty or impossibility of reconciling statements in so-called inspired works,

the incongruity of ancient Oriental customs as compared with modern and European ideas —these and many other points, all of which require a scholar to deal with them, may furnish lines of investigation. But, indeed, the modes of attack may be indefinitely varied. On all sides, doctrinal religion has been, and is daily, attacked; at all points it has been, and is daily, defended to the full satisfaction of the defenders. The assailants can never perceive that they are beaten off at every point; the defenders can never be made to understand that their stronghold has been utterly demolished.

The Religious Problem at the present moment has been, in fact, so far advanced that research, defence, or attack by persons not qualified by special education in one or other of these lines is absolutely futile. For the greater number, dulness of perception, ignorance, want of early training, self-conceit, and that sheer incapacity either to perceive or to tell the truth which seems to be a special firmity of the age, make research impossible, attack futile, and defence powerless. And

even for those who seem to have the right to lead, the fact that we are born into the ideas of our time, as well as into its creeds and traditions, is a dire obstacle to clearness of vision. We are surrounded, from birth upwards, by a network of ideas, many false, many conventional, many mere prejudices. But, such as they are, they tear the flesh if we try to break through them; by reason of these bonds we cannot march straight, we cannot see clearly. Education, reading, the literature, and the common talk of the day, so far from helping us, seem only to raise up thicker clouds about us which we cannot disperse, neither can we pass through them.

Does, then, this act of superlative courage, demanded by fearless inquiry, always lead the man who has achieved it towards atheism or agnosticism? Not so. The history of the Churches shows that there have been many men who have embarked upon such an inquiry honestly and boldly, and have come out of it armed and strengthened with a natural religion upon which they have been able to graft a Christianity far deeper, stronger, and more real

than that which is commonly taught in the pulpits, the schools, the catechisms, and the litanies of the Churches. But, as we said before, such an inquiry is not possible for every man.

In Jefferies' "Story of My Heart" we have a tale half told. You may read in it, if you will, the abandonment, rather than the loss, of his early faith; you cannot read in it, but you shall hear, if you persist to the end of this volume, how he found it again. But the man who has once thrown off the old yoke of Authority can never put it on again. Henceforth he stands alone, yet not alone, for he is face to face with his God.

Again, the network of custom and tradition which lies around us contains all our friends as well as ourselves. Those who are unlucky (or lucky) enough to break through and to get outside it have to separate themselves from their friends; they have to find new friends—which is difficult—new companions, at least. And then the novel position is a kind of standing challenge to old friends. The old equality is gone, because, if the new philosopher is right, he is intellectually

far above his associates. And since friendship cannot endure the loss of equality, the ties of years are severed. Instead of the warmth of friendship, one feels, with the coldness, the reproach of isolation. This is a consideration, however, which would weigh little with Jefferies, who lived, of free choice, in isolation.

Again, many men find a sufficient support on the great questions of faith—which they seldom or never formulate to themselves—in the fact that certain men, whom they very deeply venerate, believe in certain doctrines. That such a man as Dean Stanley, for instance —a scholar, a man of unblemished life, whose purity of soul and natural nobility of character lifted him high above the average of man—was also a devout Christian, and a pillar of the Church of England, has been, and is still, a solid guarantee to thousands who remember his example that the religion which was able to light his feet through the valley of death, and to sustain his heart while life was ebbing, must be true. This is a kindly and a natural aid to faith. And it is another illus-

tration of the immense, the boundless influence of example. The mediæval scholar believed in the Christian religion because even the horrible scandals of Rome could not destroy it. The modern Churchman modestly and humbly believes his creed mainly because men very greatly his superiors in learning and in elevation of soul believe it, and find in it their greatest consolation, and their only hope. Jefferies had no such reverence. The great leaders of the Church came not to the Wiltshire Downs. His own reason should suffice for himself. Was he, therefore, presumptuous? While any rags of Protestant independence and freedom of thought yet linger among us, let us, a thousand times, say, No!

Other men, as is well known, take refuge in Authority. This seems so easy as to be elementary in its simplicity. Authority does not interfere with the practical business of life, with the getting as much wealth as we can, and as much enjoyment as we can, while life lasts. And after death Authority kindly assures us that all shall be done for us to ensure ultimate enjoyment of more good things. We cannot,

certainly, all seek into the origins and causes of things; some must listen and obey. There is the Authority of example; there is also the Authority of Church rule and discipline But Jefferies was one of those who cannot listen and obey.

Most books which deal with the difficulties and the loss of faith deal also largely at the outset with the bitterness and the agonies of the soul when doubt begins; with the long discussions based upon premises which are first questioned tentatively, and then wholly denied; with the consequent estrangement of friends; with the laying down of one set of shackles in order to take up another, as when a man, after infinite heart-searchings, exchanges one little sect for another.

Others, again, who think it necessary to put aside their religion, do so with a curious rage. They vehemently despise, and have no words too strong for their contempt of those who refuse to follow them. As for the doctrines themselves, they are — these renegades cry aloud — unworthy the consideration of any who have the least pretensions to intellect.

Everybody knows this kind. The pervert—the renegade—is the fiercest of persecutors, the most intolerant in practice. The bitterness in his mind is caused, or it is increased, by the galling fact that though he is a rebel, he is always, whatever sect he has abandoned, an unsuccessful rebel. His old king yet reigneth; he cannot dethrone that king; it is impossible for him; at the most he can but seduce from their allegiance a few, and for all his railing the loyal subjects of that king remain loyal.

Jefferies, for his part, has no agonies of soul to chronicle, nor does he watch for and set down the stages of unbelief, nor does he tell us of any arguments with friends. The local curate is never considered or consulted; friends are neglected; and he is not in the least degree angry with those who remain loyal to their old religion.

In point of fact, this remarkable book never mentions the old religion at all. This is a very singular—even an unique—method of treatment. There is no question of the common lines of research: not one of them is followed. The author begins, and he goes on,

with the assumption that there is no religion at all which need be considered. On the broad downs the only bell ever heard is the distant sheep-bell, the only hymn of praise is the song of the lark. He has wandered among these lonely hills until he has forgotten the village church and all that he was taught there. Everything has clean escaped his memory. It is not that the old teaching no longer guides his conduct; the old teaching no longer lives at all in his mind.

He has communed so much with Nature that he is intoxicated with her fulness and her beauty. Nothing else seems worth thinking of. He lies upon the turf and feels the embrace of the great round world.

"I used to lie down in solitary corners at full length on my back, so as to feel the embrace of the earth. The grass stood high above me, and the shadows of the tree-branches danced on my face. I looked up at the sky, with half-closed eyes to bear the dazzling light. Bees buzzed over, sometimes a butterfly passed, there was a hum in the air, greenfinches sang

in the hedge. Gradually entering into the intense life of the summer days—a life which burned around as if every grass-blade and leaf were a torch—I came to feel the long-drawn life of the earth back into the dimmest past, while the sun of the moment was warm on me. . . . This sunlight linked me through the ages to that past consciousness."

Again, he says that, wandering alone, he spoke in his soul to the earth, the sun, the air, and the distant sea far beyond sight :

"I thought of the earth's firmness—I felt it bear me up; through the grassy couch there came an influence as if I could feel the great earth speaking to me. I thought of the wandering air—its pureness, which is its beauty ; the air touched me and gave me something of itself. I spoke to the sea, though so far, in my mind I saw it, green at the rim of the earth and blue in deeper ocean ; I desired to have its strength, its mystery and glory."

Everything is so full of life, everything around him, the grass-blades, the flowers, the

leaves, the grasshoppers, the birds; all the air is so full of life that he himself seems to live more largely only by being conscious of this multitudinous life. And at length he prays. He prays for a deeper and a fuller soul, that he may take from all something of their grandeur, beauty, and energy, and gather it to himself. In answer—let us think—to this prayer there was granted unto him a Vision. To every man who truly meditates and prays, there comes in the end a Vision—a Vision of a Flying Roll; a Vision of Four Chariots; a Vision of a Basket of Summer Fruit. To this man came the Vision, rarely granted, of the infinite possibilities in man. He saw how much greater and grander he might become, how his senses might be intensified, how his frame might be perfected, how his soul might become fuller. Morning, noon, and night he sees this Vision, and he prays continually for that increased fulness of soul which is the chief splendour of his Vision.

"Sometimes I went to a deep, narrow valley in the hills, silent and solitary. The sky

crossed from side to side, like a roof supported on two walls of green. Sparrows chirped in the wheat at the verge above, their calls falling like the twittering of swallows from the air. There was no other sound. The short grass was dried gray as it grew by the heat; the sun hung over the narrow vale as if it had been put there by hand. Burning, burning, the sun glowed on the sward at the foot of the slope where these thoughts burned into me. How many, many years, how many cycles of years, how many bundles of cycles of years, had the sun glowed down thus on that hollow? Since it was formed how long? Since it was worn and shaped, groove-like, in the flanks of the hills by mighty forces which had ebbed. Alone with the sun which glowed on the work when it was done, I saw back through space to the old time of tree-ferns, of the lizard flying through the air, the lizard-dragon wallowing in sea foam, the mountainous creatures, twice elephantine, feeding on land; all the crooked sequence of life. The dragon-fly which passed me traced a continuous descent from the fly marked on stone

in those days. The immense time lifted me like a wave rolling under a boat; my mind seemed to raise itself as the swell of the cycles came; it felt strong with the power of the ages. With all that time and power I prayed: that I might have in my soul the intellectual part of it; the idea, the thought. Like a shuttle the mind shot to and fro the past and the present, in an instant.

"Full to the brim of the wondrous past, I felt the wondrous present. For the day—the very moment I breathed, that second of time then in the valley, was as marvellous, as grand, as all that had gone before. Now, this moment, was the wonder and the glory. Now, this moment, was exceedingly wonderful. Now, this moment, give me all the thought, all the idea, all the soul expressed in the cosmos around me. Give me still more, for the interminable universe, past and present, is but earth; give me the unknown soul, wholly apart from it, the soul of which I know only that when I touch the ground, when the sunlight touches

my hand, it is not there. Therefore the heart looks into space to be away from earth. With all the cycles, and the sunlight streaming through them, with all that is meant by the present, I thought in the deep vale and prayed."

Presently, the vague yearning—this passionate prayer for the realization of a splendid Vision—takes a more definite shape:

"First, I desired that I might do or find something to exalt the soul, something to enable it to live its own life, a more powerful existence now. Secondly, I desired to be able to do something for the flesh, to make a discovery or perfect a method by which the fleshly body might enjoy more pleasure, longer life, and suffer less pain. Thirdly, to construct a more flexible engine with which to carry into execution the design of the will."

As for the soul, his prayer was for the life beyond this.

"Recognising my own inner consciousness, the psyche, so clearly, death did not seem to me to affect the personality. In dissolution

there was no bridgeless chasm, no unfathomable gulf of separation; the spirit did not immediately become inaccessible, leaping at a bound to an immeasurable distance. Look at another person while living; the soul is not visible, only the body which it animates. Therefore, merely because after death the soul is not visible is no demonstration that it does not still live. The condition of being unseen is the same condition which occurs while the body is living, so that intrinsically there is nothing exceptional, or supernatural, in the life of the soul after death. Resting by the tumulus, the spirit of the man who had been interred there was to me really alive, and very close. This was quite natural, as natural and simple as the grass waving in the wind, the bees humming, and the larks' songs. Only by the strongest effort of the mind could I understand the idea of extinction; that was supernatural, requiring a miracle; the immortality of the soul natural, like earth. Listening to the sighing of the grass I felt immortality as I felt the beauty of the summer morning."

Three things, he says, were found twelve thousand years ago by prehistoric man: the existence of the soul, immortality, the Deity. Since then, nothing further has been found. Well, he would find something more. What is it he would find? It can only be discovered by one who has that fulness of the soul for which he prays.

"As I write these words, in the very moment, I feel that the whole air, the sunshine out yonder lighting up the ploughed earth, the distant sky, the circumambient ether, and that far space, is full of soul-secrets, soul-life, things outside the experience of all the ages. The fact of my own existence as I write, as I exist at this second, is so marvellous, so miracle-like, strange, and supernatural to me, that I unhesitatingly conclude I am always on the margin of life illimitable, and that there are higher conditions than existence. Everything around is supernatural; everything so full of unexplained meaning."

It is only by the soul that one lives. As

for Nature, everything in her is anti-human. Nothing in Nature cares for man. The earth would let him perish, and would not trouble, for his sake, to bring forth food or water. The sun would scorch and burn him. He cannot drink the sea. The wild creatures would mangle and slay him. Diseases would rack him. The very things which most he loves live for themselves, and not for him. If all mankind were to die to-morrow, Nature would still go on, careless of his fate. There is no spirit, no intelligence in Nature. And in the events of human life, everything, he says, happens by pure chance. No prudence in conduct, no wisdom or foresight, can effect anything. The most trivial circumstance—the smallest accident is sufficient to upset the deepest plan of the wisest mind. All things happen by chance. This, then, is the melancholy outcome of all his passionate love of Nature. It is to this conclusion that he has been brought by his solitary communion with Nature. Man is quite alone, he says, without help and without hope of guidance. The Deity—but, then, what does he mean by a

Deity? He means, I think, only the popular and vulgar conception—suffers everything to take place by chance. Yet there is, there must be, because he feels it and sees it, something higher and beyond. "For want of words I write soul."

The book is full of this Vision of the Life beyond the present; he tries, but sometimes in vain, to clothe his Vision with words. It never leaves him. It is with him in the heart of London, where the tides of life converge to the broad area before the Royal Exchange. If he goes to see the pictures in the National Gallery, it is with him. If he looks at the old sculpture in the Museum, it is still with him. Always the dream of the perfect man superior to death and to change; perfect in physical beauty, perfect in mind.

"I went down to the sea. I stood where the foam came to my feet, and looked out over the sunlit waters. The great earth bearing the richness of the harvest, and its hills golden with corn, was at my back; its strength and firmness under me. The great sun shone

above, the wide sea was before me, the wind came sweet and strong from the waves. The life of the earth and the sea, the glow of the sun filled me; I touched the surge with my hand, I lifted my face to the sun, I opened my lips to the wind. I prayed aloud in the roar of the waves—my soul was strong as the sea and prayed with the sea's might. 'Give me fulness of life like to the sea and the sun, to the earth and the air; give me fulness of physical life, mind equal and beyond their fulness; give me a greatness and perfection of soul higher than all things, give me my inexpressible desire which swells in me like a tide, give it to me with all the force of the sea.'

"Then I rested, sitting by the wheat; the bank of beach was between me and the sea, but the waves beat against it; the sea was there, the sea was present and at hand. By the dry wheat I rested; I did not think; I was inhaling the richness of the sea; all the strength and depth of meaning of the sea and earth came to me again. I rubbed out some of the wheat in my hands, I took up a piece of clod and crumbled it in my fingers—it was a joy

to touch it—I held my hand so that I could see the sunlight gleam on the slightly moist surface of the skin. The earth and sun were to me like my flesh and blood, and the air of the sea life.

"With all the greater existence I drew from them I prayed for a bodily life equal to it, for a soul-life beyond my thought, for my inexpressible desire of more than I could shape even into idea. There was something higher than idea, invisible to thought as air to the eye; give me bodily life equal in fulness to the strength of earth, and sun, and sea; give me the soul-life of my desire. Once more I went down to the sea, touched it, and said farewell. So deep was the inhalation of this life that day, that it seemed to remain in me for years. This was a real pilgrimage."

There is much more—a great deal more—in this remarkable book; but what follows is mostly an amplification of what has gone before. He dwells upon the striving after physical perfection, the sacred duty of every man and woman to enrich and strengthen

their physical life, by care, exercise, and in every possible way.

"I believe all manner of asceticism to be the vilest blasphemy—blasphemy towards the whole of the human race. I believe in the flesh and the body, which is worthy of worship—to see a perfect human body unveiled causes a sense of worship. The ascetics are the only persons who are impure. Increase of physical beauty is attended by increase of soul beauty. The soul is the higher even by gazing on beauty. Let me be fleshly perfect."

Do not misunderstand him. This intense craving after physical perfection, this yearning after beauty, is not a sensual craving. It is not the Greek's love of perfect form, though Jefferies had this love, as well. It is far more than this; it means, in the mind of this man, that without perfection of the body there can be no perfect life of the soul.

In that letter where the Apostle Paul speaks at length of Death and the Resurrection, he concludes with the assurance—he writes for his own consolation, I think, as well as that of his

disciples—that the body, as well as the soul, shall live again; but the body glorified, made perfect and beautiful beyond human power of thought, to be wedded to the soul purified beyond human power of understanding. Is it not strange that this solitary questioner, longing and praying for a deeper and fuller understanding—a fuller soul—should also have arrived at the perception of the wonderful truth that the perfect soul demands the perfect body? In his mind there are no echoes ringing of Paul's great Vision—the whole of his old creed, all of it, has fallen from him and is lost: it is his own Vision granted to himself. How? After long and solitary meditation on the hillside, as in the old times great Visions came to those who fasted in their lonely cells and solitary caves. Great thoughts come not to those who seek them not. The mind which would receive them must be first prepared. The example of Jefferies, whose great thoughts only came to him after long years of meditation apart from man, may make us understand the Visions which used to reward the monk, the fakir, the hermit of the lonely laura.

Then he goes back to his theory that everything happens by chance. So long as men believe that everything is done for them, progress is impossible. Once grasp the truth that nothing is done for man, and that he has everything to do for himself, and all is possible. Still, this is not a proof that chance rules the world. And, again, the fact that man, alone of created beings, is able to grasp this, or any other truth, is not that gift everything in itself?

"Nothing whatsoever is done for us. We are born naked, and not even protected by a shaggy covering. Nothing is done for us. The first and strongest command (using the word to convey the idea only) that nature, the universe, our own bodies give is to do everything for ourselves. The sea does not make boats for us, nor the earth of her own will build us hospitals. The injured lie bleeding, and no invisible power lifts them up. The maidens were scorched in the midst of their devotions, and their remains make a mound hundreds of yards long. The infants perished in the snow, and the ravens tore their limbs.

Those in the theatre crushed each other to the death-agony. For how long, for how many thousand years, must the earth and the sea, and the fire and the air, utter these things and force them upon us before they are admitted in their full significance?

"These things speak with a voice of thunder. From every human being whose body has been racked by pain, from every human being who has suffered from accident or disease, from every human being drowned, burned, or slain by negligence, there goes up a continually-increasing cry louder than the thunder. An awe-inspiring cry dread to listen to, which no one dares listen to, against which ears are stopped by the wax of superstition, and the wax of criminal selfishness:—These miseries are your doing, because you have mind and thought, and could have prevented them. You can prevent them in the future. You do not even try.

"It is perfectly certain that all diseases without exception are preventible, or if not so, that they can be so weakened as to do no harm. It is perfectly certain that all accidents are

preventible; there is not one that does not arise from folly or negligence. All accidents are crimes. It is perfectly certain that all human beings are capable of physical happinesss. It is absolutely incontrovertible that the ideal shape of the human being is attainable to the exclusion of deformities. It is incontrovertible that there is no necessity for any man to die but of old age, and that if death cannot be prevented life can be prolonged far beyond the farthest now known. It is incontrovertible that at the present time no one ever dies of old age. Not one single person ever dies of old age, or of natural causes, for there is no such thing as a natural cause of death. They die of disease or weakness which is the result of disease, either in themselves or in their ancestors. No such thing as old age is known to us. We do not even know what old age would be like, because no one ever lives to it."

This remarkable book is a record almost, if not quite, unique. The writer is not a man of science; he has not been trained in logic and dialectics, he is not a scholar, though he

has read much. But he can think for himself, and he has the gift of carrying on the same line of thought unwearied, persistent, like a bloodhound on the scent, year after year. And as a record it is absolutely true; there are no concealments in it, no affectations; it is all true. He has gone to Nature—the Nature he loves so well—for an answer to the problems that vex his soul. Nature replies with a stony stare; she has no answer. What is man? She cares nothing for man. Everything, so far as she knows, and so far as man is concerned, takes place by chance. Then he gets his Vision of the Perfect Soul, and it fills his heart and makes him happy, and seems to satisfy all his longings. And the old Christian teaching, the prayer to the Father, the village church and its services, the quiet churchyard —where are they? Out on the wild downs you do not see or hear of them at all. They are not in the whisper of the air, or in the rustle of the grass-blades; they are not in the sunshine; they are not in the cloud; they are not in the depths of the azure sky.

And so he concludes:

"I have only just commenced to realize the immensity of thought which lies outside the knowledge of the senses. Still, on the hills and by the sea-shore, I seek and pray deeper than ever. The sun burns southwards over the sea and before the wave runs its shadow, constantly slipping on the advancing slope till it curls and covers its dark image at the shore. Over the rim of the horizon waves are flowing as high and wide as those that break upon the beach. These that come to me and beat the trembling shore are like the thoughts that have been known so long; like the ancient, iterated, and reiterated thoughts that have broken on the strand of mind for thousands of years. Beyond and over the horizon I feel that there are other waves of ideas unknown to me, flowing as the stream of ocean flows. Knowledge of facts is limitless, they lie at my feet innumerable like the countless pebbles; knowledge of thought so circumscribed! Ever the same thoughts come that have been written down centuries and centuries.

"Let me launch forth and sail over the rim

of the sea yonder, and when another rim arises over that, and again and onwards into an ever-widening ocean of idea and life. For with all the strength of the wave, and its succeeding wave, the depth and race of the tide, the clear definition of the sky; with all the subtle power of the great sea, there rises an equal desire. Give me life strong and full as the brimming ocean; give me thoughts wide as its plain; give me a soul beyond these. Sweet is the bitter sea by the shore where the faint blue pebbles are lapped by the green-gray wave, where the wind-quivering foam is loath to leave the lashed stone. Sweet is the bitter sea, and the clear green in which the gaze seeks the soul, looking through the glass into itself. The sea thinks for me as I listen and ponder: the sea thinks, and every boom of the wave repeats my prayer.

"Sometimes I stay on the wet sands as the tide rises, listening to the rush of the lines of foam in layer upon layer; the wash swells and circles about my feet, I lave my hands in it, I lift a little in my hollowed palm, I take the life of the sea to me. My soul rising to

the immensity utters its desire-prayer with all the strength of the sea. Or, again, the full stream of ocean beats upon the shore, and the rich wind feeds the heart, the sun burns brightly;—the sense of soul-life burns in me like a torch.

"Leaving the shore, I walk among the trees; a cloud passes, and the sweet short rain comes mingled with sunbeams and flower-scented air. The finches sing among the fresh green leaves of the beeches. Beautiful it is, in summer days, to see the wheat wave, and the long grass foam-flecked of flower yield and return to the wind. My soul of itself always desires; these are to it as fresh food. I have found in the hills another valley grooved in prehistoric times, where, climbing to the top of the hollow, I can see the sea. Down in the hollow I look up; the sky stretches over, the sun burns as it seems but just above the hill, and the wind sweeps onward. As the sky extends beyond the valley, so I know that there are ideas beyond the valley of my thought; I know that there is something infinitely higher than Deity. The great sun burning in the sky, the

sea, the firm earth, all the stars of night are feeble—all, all the cosmos is feeble; it is not strong enough to utter my prayer-desire. My soul cannot reach to its full desire of prayer. I need no earth, or sea, or sun to think my thought. If my thought-part—the psyche—were entirely separated from the body, and from the earth, I should of myself desire the same. In itself my soul desires; my existence, my soul-existence is in itself my prayer, and so long as it exists so long will it pray that I may have the fullest soul-life."

CHAPTER XI.

THE CHILD WANDERS IN THE WOOD.

THERE is a very delightful old story which used to be given to children, though I have not seen it for a long time in the hands of any children. It was called "The Story without an End." A child wandered among the flowers, who talked to him. That is the whole story. There were coloured pictures in it. The story began without a beginning, and it came to a sudden stop without an ending.

It is perhaps upon a reminiscence of this old story that Jefferies has based nearly all his own. They are very delightful, especially the shorter stories; but they seldom have any end. There is sometimes, but not often, a story; there is generally only a succession of

scenes—some delightful, all beautiful, and all original in the sense that nobody except Jefferies could possibly have written any of them. The child wanders. That is all. Some day, when the worth of this writer is universally recognised, these scenes and stories will be detached from the papers with which they are published, and issued in separate form, as beautifully illustrated as the art of the next generation—this will not take place for another generation—will allow.

For instance, Guido — they called him Guido because they thought that in childhood Guido the painter must have greatly resembled this boy—runs along the grassy lane at the top of a bank between the fir-trees till he comes to a wheat-field. Then he climbs down into this field, and sees the most wonderful things: lovely azure corn-flowers —"curious flowers with knobs surrounded with little blue flowers, like a lady's bonnet. They were a beautiful blue, not like any other blue, not like the violets in the garden, or the sky over the trees, or the geranium in the grass, or the bird's-eyes by the path." Then

he wanders on, starting a rabbit, scaring a hawk, and listening to the birds. Presently he sits down on the branch of an oak, with his feet dangling over a streamlet. Then he remembers—children do remember things in the strangest way—that if he wants to hear a story, or to talk with the grass, he really must not try to catch the butterflies. So he touches the rushes with his foot, and says, "Rush, rush, tell them I am here." Immediately there follows a little wind, and the wheat swings to and fro, the oak-leaves rustle, the rushes bow, and the shadows slip forwards and back again. After this, of course, the nearest wheat-ear begins to talk. Now the wheat has been so long growing for the use of man that it has grown to love him. Think of that! And it pains the wheat to see so much misery and needless labour among the people. Of course, we cannot expect a wheat-ear to know that little boys do not understand the problems of poverty and labour.

"'There is one thing we do not like, and that is, all the labour and the misery. Why

cannot your people have us without so much labour, and why are so many of you unhappy? Why cannot they be all happy with us as you are, dear? For hundreds and hundreds of years now the wheat every year has been sorrowful for your people, and I think we get more sorrowful every year about it, because, as I was telling you just now, the flowers go, and the swallows go, the old, old oaks go, and that oak will go, under the shade of which you are lying, Guido; and if your people do not gather the flowers now, and watch the swallows, and listen to the blackbirds whistling, as you are listening now while I talk, then Guido, my love, they will never pick any flowers, nor hear any birds' songs. They think they will, they think that when they have toiled, and worked a long time, almost all their lives, then they will come to the flowers, and the birds, and be joyful in the sunshine. But no, it will not be so, for then they will be old themselves, and their ears dull, and their eyes dim, so that the birds will sound a great distance off, and the flowers will not seem bright.

"'Of course, we know that the greatest part of your people cannot help themselves, and must labour on like the reapers till their ears are full of the dust of age. That only makes us more sorrowful, and anxious that things should be different. I do not suppose we should think about them had we not been in man's hand so long that now we have got to feel with man. Every year makes it more pitiful, because then there are more flowers gone, and added to the vast numbers of those gone before, and never gathered, or looked at, though they could have given so much pleasure. And all the work and labour, and thinking, and reading, and learning that your people do ends in nothing—not even one flower. We cannot understand why it should be so. There are thousands of wheat-ears in this field, more than you would know how to write down with your pencil, though you have learned your tables, sir. Yet all of us thinking, and talking, cannot understand why it is when we consider how clever your people are, and how they bring ploughs, and steam-engines, and put up wires along the roads to tell you things

when you are miles away, and sometimes we are sown where we can hear the hum, hum, all day of the children learning in the school. The butterflies flutter over us, and the sun shines, and the doves are very, very happy at their nest, but the children go on hum, hum inside this house, and learn, learn. So we suppose you must be very clever, and yet you cannot manage this. All your work is wasted, and you labour in vain—you dare not leave it a minute.

"'If you left it a minute it would all be gone; it does not mount up and make a store, so that all of you could sit by it and be happy. Directly you leave off you are hungry, and thirsty, and miserable like the beggars that tramp along the dusty road here. All the thousand years of labour since this field was first ploughed have not stored up anything for you. It would not matter about the work so much if you were only happy; the bees work every year, but they are happy; the doves build a nest every year, but they are very, very happy. We think it must be because you do not come out to us and be with us

and think more as we do. It is not because your people have not got plenty to eat and drink—you have as much as the bees. Why, just look at us! Look at the wheat that grows all over the world; all the figures that were ever written in pencil could not tell how much, it is such an immense quantity. Yet your people starve and die of hunger every now and then, and we have seen the wretched beggars tramping along the road. We have known of times when there was a great pile of us, almost a hill piled up; it was not in this country, it was in another warmer country, and yet no one dared to touch it—they died at the bottom of the hill of wheat. The earth is full of skeletons of people who have died of hunger. They are dying now this minute in your big cities, with nothing but stones all round them, stone walls and stone streets; not jolly stones like those you threw in the water, dear—hard, unkind stones that make them cold and let them die, while we are growing here, millions of us, in the sunshine with the butterflies floating over us. This makes us unhappy; I was very unhappy this morning

till you came running over and played with us.

"'It is not because there is not enough: it is because your people are so short-sighted, so jealous and selfish, and so curiously infatuated with things that are not so good as your old toys which you have flung away and forgotten. And you teach the children hum, hum, all day to care about such silly things, and to work for them, and to look to them as the object of their lives. It is because you do not share us among you without price or difference; because you do not share the great earth among you fairly, without spite and jealousy and avarice; because you will not agree; you silly, foolish people to let all the flowers wither for a thousand years while you keep each other at a distance, instead of agreeing and sharing them! Is there something in you—as there is poison in the nightshade, you know it, dear, your papa told you not to touch it—is there a sort of poison in your people that works them up into a hatred of one another? Why, then, do you not agree and have all things, all the great earth can give you, just as we have the

sunshine and the rain? How happy your people could be if they would only agree! But you go on teaching even the little children to follow the same silly objects, hum, hum, hum, all the day, and they will grow up to hate each other, and to try which can get the most round things—you have one in your pocket.'

"'Sixpence,' said Guido. 'It's quite a new one.'

"'And other things quite as silly,' the Wheat continued. 'All the time the flowers are flowering, but they will go, even the oaks will go. We think the reason you do not all have plenty, and why you do not do only just a little work, and why you die of hunger if you leave off, and why so many of you are unhappy in body and mind, and all the misery is because you have not got a spirit like the wheat, like us; you will not agree, and you will not share, and you will hate each other, and you will be so avaricious, and you will *not* touch the flowers, or go into the sunshine (you would rather half of you died among the hard stones first), and you will teach your children hum,

hum, to follow in some foolish course that has caused you all this unhappiness a thousand years, and you will *not* have a spirit like us, and feel like us. Till you have a spirit like us, and feel like us, you will never, never be happy.'"

Was not that a fine talk for the child to have with the wheat-ear? And there is more of it, a great deal more in this story without an end which you will find in the book called "The Open Air."

Again, another boy—not Guido by any means, nor in the least like Guido—had been sent to gather acorns. He gathered a few, dropped them into his bag, and lay down in the warm corner by the root of the tree to sleep. There his grandmother found him, and there she beat him.

"A wickeder boy never lived: nothing could be done with the reprobate. He was her grandson—at least, the son of her daughter, for he was not legitimate. The man drank, the girl died, as was believed, of sheer starva-

tion: the granny kept the child, and he was now between ten and eleven years old. She had done and did her duty, as she understood it. A prayer-meeting was held in her cottage twice a week, she prayed herself aloud among them, she was a leading member of the sect. Neither example, precept, nor the rod could change that boy's heart. In time perhaps she got to beat him from habit rather than from any particular anger of the moment, just as she fetched water and filled her kettle, as one of the ordinary events of the day. Why did not the father interfere? Because if so he would have had to keep his son: so many shillings a week the less for ale.

"In the garden attached to the cottage there was a small shed with a padlock, used to store produce or wood in. One morning, after a severe beating, she drove the boy in there and locked him in the whole day without food. It was no use, he was as hardened as ever.

"A footpath which crossed the field went by the cottage, and every Sunday those who were walking to church could see the boy in the window with granny's Bible open before

him. There he had to sit, the door locked, under terror of stick, and study the page. What was the use of compelling him to do that? He could not read. 'No,' said the old woman, 'he won't read, but I makes him look at his book.'

"The thwacking went on for some time, when one day the boy was sent on an errand two or three miles, and for a wonder started willingly enough. At night he did not return, nor the next day, nor the next, and it was as clear as possible that he had run away. No one thought of tracking his footsteps, or following up the path he had to take, which passed a railway, brooks, and a canal. He had run away, and he might stop away: it was beautiful summer weather, and it would do him no harm to stop out for a week. A dealer who had business in a field by the canal thought indeed that he saw something in the water, but he did not want any trouble, nor indeed did he know that someone was missing. Most likely a dead dog; so he turned his back and went to look again at the cow he thought of buying. A barge came by, and the steers-

woman, with a pipe in her mouth, saw something roll over and come up under the rudder: the length of the barge having passed over it. She knew what it was, but she wanted to reach the wharf and go ashore and have a quart of ale. No use picking it up, only make a mess on deck, there was no reward — 'Gee-up! Neddy.' The barge went on, turning up the mud in the shallow water, sending ripples washing up to the grassy meadow shores, while the moorhens hid in the flags till it was gone. In time a labourer walking on the towing-path saw 'it,' and fished it out, and with it a slender ash sapling, with twine and hook, a worm still on it. This was why the dead boy had gone so willingly, thinking to fish in the 'river,' as he called the canal. When his feet slipped and he fell in, his fishing-line somehow became twisted about his arms and legs, else most likely he would have scrambled out, as it was not very deep. This was the end; nor was he even remembered. Does anyone sorrow for the rook, shot, and hung up as a scarecrow? The boy had been talked to, and held up as a scarecrow all his

life: he was dead, and that is all. As for granny, she felt no twinge: she had done her duty."

There is another chapter among these papers which is a real story. It is, I am certain, a true story, because the plot is not at all in the manner of Jefferies. It is called, grimly, "Field Play." The "Story of Dolly" it should be called—of hapless Dolly—of Dolly the village beauty. Would you like to see how Jefferies can describe a beautiful woman?

"So fair a complexion could not brown even in summer, exposed to the utmost heat. The beams indeed did heighten the hue of her cheeks a little, but it did not shade to brown. Her chin and neck were wholly untanned, white and soft, and the blue veins roamed at their will. Lips red, a little full perhaps; teeth slightly prominent, but white and gleamy as she smiled. Dark-brown hair in no great abundance, always slipping out of its confinement and straggling, now on her forehead, and now on her shoulders, like wandering bines of bryony. The softest of brown eyes under long eyelashes; eyes that seemed to see

everything in its gentlest aspect, that could see no harm anywhere. A ready smile on the face, and a smile in the form. Her shape yielded so easily at each movement that it seemed to smile as she walked. Her nose was the least pleasing feature—not delicate enough to fit with the complexion, and distinctly upturned, though not offensively. But it was not noticed; no one saw anything beyond the laughing lips, the laughing shape, the eyes that melted so near to tears. The torn dress, the straggling hair, the tattered shoes, the unmended stocking, the straw hat split, the mingled poverty and carelessness—perhaps rather dreaminess—disappeared when once you had met the full untroubled gaze of those beautiful eyes. Untroubled, that is, with any ulterior thought of evil or cunning; they were as open as the day, the day which you can make your own for evil or good. So, too, like the day, was she ready to the making."

The miserable, hapless fate of poor Dolly, the horrible tragedy of her life and death, is told with relentless truth and fidelity. In

Arcadia such things may happen, and, I suppose, do constantly happen. The story belongs properly to the chapter on English country life last quarter of the nineteenth century, which, when it is written, will, I think, be taken altogether from the works of Jefferies and Thomas Hardy.

"The Story of Bevis" is the story of Guido writ large. It is also the story of Jefferies himself as a boy. Observe, most writers of fiction, if they were proposing to write the story of a boy, would first create an imaginary boy, and then surround him with imaginary adventures, invented on purpose for that boy. Jefferies does nothing of the kind. It is not his method. He remembers his own boyhood—the most delightful part of it—when he played with his brother and his cousin upon the shores of the lake behind the farmhouse, and made his canoe, and paddled about the water exploring the creeks and islets, the bays and harbours of that wonderful coast. The boy, Bevis, is, in fact, himself. Therefore, he does all the things that Jefferies and his brother did in their boyhood. Bevis

even makes a raft, and, when the raft is made, he sails down the Mississippi as far as Central Africa, where, of course, he encounters savages, and has to fight them. To discover an unknown island on such a voyage is an adventure certain to be met with. To build a hut, to provision a cave, and to dwell for a while upon that island is another adventure equally certain when one goes to Central Africa, and there is no reason at all why such a story should ever have any end. Consequently, there is none—only a full stop, and then a line with "Finis" written under it. In fact, there never was such a book of boy's make-believe. Observe, if you please, a thing which shows the real genius of the writer. It is that you feel, all the time you are reading the book, the village itself only a quarter of a mile from Central Africa. The bailiff, and the dogs, and the village lads are always coming across us in the midst of the Central African jungle in the most natural and absurd way. For boys, as Jefferies remembered, are never quite carried away by their own imaginations. There are many very fine passages in

the book, which has only one fault—it is three times as long as it should have been. The conception is delightful. In the execution the author has not known when to stay his hand. Perhaps one of those limitations of which I have spoken already was an imperfect faculty of selection. For boys, the story should have been compressed into one volume. One cannot understand, indeed, how his publishers consented to put forth the book in three-volume novel form. Nobody, after the first chapter, could possibly accept it as a three-volume novel. But it contains many very striking and beautiful and poetic pages.

For instance, Bevis watches the sunrise:

"The sun had not yet stood out from the orient, but his precedent light shone through the translucent blue. Yet it was not blue, nor is there any word, nor is a word possible to convey the feeling unless one could be built up of signs and symbols like those in the book of the magician, which glowed and burned to and fro the page. For the blue of the precious sapphire is thick to it, the turquoise dull:

these hard surfaces are no more to be compared to it than sand and gravel. They are but stones, hard, cold, pitiful: that which gives them their lustre is the light. Through delicate porcelain sometimes the light comes, and it is not the porcelain, it is the light that is lovely. But porcelain is clay, and the light is shorn, checked, and shrunken. Down through the beauteous azure came the Light itself, pure, unreflected Light, untouched, untarnished even by the dew-sweetened petal of a flower, descending, flowing like a wind, a wind of glory sweeping through the blue. A luminous purple glowing as Love glows in the cheek, so glowed the passion of the heavens.

"Two things only reach the soul. By touch there is indeed emotion. But the light in the eye, the sound of the voice! the soul trembles and like a flame leaps to meet them. So to the luminous purple azure his heart ascended."

In "Wood Magic" Jefferies carries on the story of "Bevis" and of "Guido." The

creatures all talk to the boy, which makes going into the fields and woods a much more delightful thing than it is to other boys, to whom they will not address one single word. There is a wicked weasel, for instance, caught in a gin, who tells such abominable lies as one may expect from a weasel. There is also a fable about a magpie and a jay, which fails, somehow, to arrest the reader. But when you have got through the business with the creatures—I do not care in the least for them unless Bevis is with them—you presently arrive at a most delightful chapter where Bevis is instructed by the wind. It is such a wise, wise wind, it knows so much. If Bevis will only remember the half of what the wind has taught him!

"'Bevis, my love, if you want to know all about the sun, and the stars, and everything, make haste and come to me, and I will tell you, dear. In the morning, dear, get up as quick as you can, and drink me as I come down from the hill. In the day go up on the hill, dear, and drink me again, and stay there

if you can till the stars shine out, and drink still more of me.

"'And by-and-by you will understand all about the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and the Earth which is so beautiful, Bevis. It is so beautiful, you can hardly believe how beautiful it is. Do not listen, dear, not for one moment, to the stuff and rubbish they tell you down there in the houses where they will not let me come. If they say the Earth is not beautiful, tell them they do not speak the truth. But it is not their fault, for they have never seen it, and, as they have never drank me, their eyes are closed, and their ears shut up tight. But every evening, dear, before you get into bed, do you go to your window —the same as you did the evening the Owl went by—and lift the curtain and look up at the sky, and I shall be somewhere about, or else I shall be quiet in order that there may be no clouds, so that you may see the stars. In the morning, as I said before, rush out and drink me up.

"'The more you drink of me, the more you will want, and the more I shall love you.

Come up to me upon the hills, and your heart will never be heavy, but your eyes will be bright, and your step quick, and you will sing and shout——'

"'So I will,' said Bevis, 'I will shout. Holloa!' and he ran up on to the top of the little round hill, to which they had now returned, and danced about on it as wild as could be.

"'Dance away, dear,' said the Wind, much delighted. 'Everybody dances who drinks me. The man in the hill there——'

"'What man?' said Bevis, 'and how did he get in the hill; just tell him I want to speak to him.'

"'Darling,' said the Wind, very quiet and softly, 'he is dead, and he is in the little hill you are standing on, under your feet. At least, he was there once, but there is nothing of him there now. Still it is his place, and as he loved me, and I loved him, I come very often and sing here.'

"'When did he die?' said Bevis. 'Did I ever see him?'

"'He died just about a minute ago, dear;

just before you came up the hill. If you were to ask the people who live in the houses, where they will not let me in (they carefully shut out the sun, too), they would tell you he died thousands of years ago; but they are foolish, very foolish. It was hardly so long ago as yesterday. Did not the Brook tell you all about that?

"'Now this man, and all his people, used to love me and drink me, as much as ever they could all day long and a great part of the night, and when they died they still wanted to be with me, and so they were all buried on the tops of the hills, and you will find these curious little mounds everywhere on the ridges, dear, where I blow along. There I come to them still, and sing through the long dry grass, and rush over the turf, and I bring the scent of the clover from the plain, and the bees come humming along upon me. The sun comes, too, and the rain. But I am here most; the sun only shines by day, and the rain only comes now and then.

* * * * *

"'There never was a yesterday,' whispered

the Wind presently, 'and there never will be to-morrow. It is all one long to-day. When the man in the hill was you were too, and he still is now you are here; but of these things you will know more when you are older, that is if you will only continue to drink me. Come, dear, let us race on again.' So the two went on and came to a hawthorn-bush, and Bevis, full of mischief always, tried to slip away from the Wind round the bush, but the Wind laughed and caught him.

"A little further and they came to the fosse of the old camp. Bevis went down into the trench, and he and the Wind raced round along it as fast as ever they could go, till presently he ran up out of it on the hill, and there was the waggon underneath him, with the load well piled up now. There was the plain, yellow with stubble; the hills beyond it and the blue valley, just the same as he had left it.

"As Bevis stood and looked down, the Wind caressed him and said, 'Good-bye, darling, I am going yonder, straight across to the blue valley and the blue sky, where

they meet; but I shall be back again when you come next time. Now remember, my dear, to drink me—come up here and drink me.'

"'Shall you be here?' said Bevis; 'are you quite sure you will be here?'

"'Yes,' said the Wind, 'I shall be quite certain to be here; I promise you, love, I will never go quite away. Promise me faithfully, too, that you will come up and drink me, and shout and race and be happy.'

"'I promise,' said Bevis, beginning to go down the hill; 'good-bye, jolly old Wind.'

"'Good-bye, dearest,' whispered the Wind, as he went across out towards the valley. As Bevis went down the hill, a blue harebell, who had been singing farewell to summer all the morning, called to him and asked him to gather her and carry her home, as she would rather go with him than stay now autumn was near.

"Bevis gathered the harebell, and ran with the flower in his hand down the hill, and as he ran the wild thyme kissed his feet and said, 'Come again, Bevis, come again.' At the bottom of the hill the waggon was loaded now;

so they lifted him up, and he rode home on the broad back of the leader."

There is one more story. I must not quote it, because it is too long, but I cannot pass it over in silence. It will be found in "Nature Round London." It is the story of a trout, and it has always filled me with the most profound and most sincere admiration. So little did Jefferies understand that he was here working out a picture of the most original kind, of the deepest interest, that he actually divides it in two, goes off to something else, and then returns to it. His inexhaustible mind scattered its treasures about as lavishly as Nature herself scatters abroad her flowers and her seeds, and with almost as little care about arrangement, selection, and grouping.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

I THINK that I have never read, in all the sad chronicles of hapless authors, anything more pitiful than the history of the last years of this life so short, yet so rich in its sheaves of golden grain and piles of purple fruit. Everything possible of long-continued torture, necessity of work, poverty, anxiety, and hope of recovery continually deferred, are crammed into the miserable record which closes this volume.

Jefferies fell ill in December, 1881, five years and a half before the end. He was attacked by a disease for which an operation of a very severe and painful nature is the only cure. It is, however, one which, in the hands of a skilful surgeon, is generally successful. Horrible

to relate, in his case, the operation proved unsuccessful, and had to be repeated again and again. Four times in twelve months the dreadful surgeon's knife was used upon this poor sufferer. For a whole year he could do no work at all. The modest savings of the preceding years were spent upon the physicians and the surgeons, and in the maintenance of his household, while the pen of the bread-winner was perforce resting. Before he was able to take pen in hand again, he was reduced to something approaching destitution. You shall read directly how, when he recovered, hope immediately returned, and he was once more happy in the thought that now he could again work, though it was to begin the world once more. Alas! the interval of hope was brief indeed. Another, and a more mysterious disease attacked him. He felt an internal pain constantly gnawing him; he could not eat without pain; he grew daily weaker; he was at last no longer able to walk; he could only crawl.

Henceforth his days and nights were a long struggle against suffering, with a determina-

tion, however, to go on with his work. Nothing more wonderful than the courage and resolution of this man. As in youth he had resolved to succeed somehow, though as yet ignorant of the better way, so now he *would* not be beaten by pain. His very best work, the work which will cause him to live, the work which places him among the writers of his country, to be remembered and to be read long after the men of his generation are dead and forgotten, was actually done while he was in this suffering. The "Pageant of Summer," for example: well, the "Pageant of Summer" reads as if it were the work of a man revelling in the warmth of the quivering air; of a man in perfect health and strength, body and mind at ease, surrendered wholly to the influence of the flowers and the sunshine, at peace, save for the natural sadness of one who communes much with himself on change, decay, and death. And yet the "Pageant of Summer" was written while he was in deadly pain and torture. Again, between 1883 and 1886 he published those collections of papers called "Life in the Fields" and "The Open Air." He also wrote "Red Deer,"

"Amaryllis," and a quantity of papers which have yet to be collected and published. If, even for a moment, he had an interval of strength, his busy pen began again to race over the paper, hasting to set down the thoughts that filled his brain.

His disease was discovered, after a period of intense suffering, to be an ulceration of the small intestine. It was weakness induced by this disease, which caused other complications, under which he gradually sank.

I suppose that Jefferies could never be considered a strong man. As a boy, tall, active, nervous, he was muscularly weaker than his younger brother. At the age of eighteen he showed symptoms which caused fear of a decline. Perhaps his intense love of the open air indicated the kind of medicine which he most needed. When he could no longer go into the open air he died. Perhaps, too, the consciousness of physical weakness, the sense of impending early death, caused him to yearn with so much longing after physical perfection and the fuller life which he clearly saw was possible. Those who are doomed to die young

—as has been often observed—have the deepest sense and the keenest enjoyment of life.

Still, though not a strong man, he was apparently a healthy man. He lived at all times a simple and a healthy life; there was nothing to show that he was going to be struck down by so cruel an illness.

The period of greatest suffering seems to have been in the year 1884. The weakness following it set in some time during the year 1885.

He writes to Mr. Charles Longman in May of the latter year:

"Your suggestion"—that he should write a year-book of Nature—"of a diary out of doors would no doubt make a good book, and I shall give serious thought to it. My great difficulty is the physical difficulty of writing. Since the spine gave way, there is no position in which I can lie or sit so as to use a pen without distress. Even a short letter like this is painful. Consequently, a vast mass of ideas go into space, for I cannot write them down."

In August he returns to the subject:

"Many thanks for your kind letter and interest in my weakness. I sometimes rather need moral support of this sort, for after so long the spirits show signs of flagging, and the way seems endless. Such sympathy, therefore, helps me very much. . . . I should have liked to have written the book you proposed. I made several attempts, but it never satisfied me. I am glad, at all events, that you have forgiven my unintentional nonfulfilment of the promise. Even yet, perhaps, I may do something in that direction. Professor Gamgee, under whom I have been lately, says that complete recovery would follow a few weeks' basking in South Africa, or, failing that, Southern Europe. There is plenty of energy in me still. I sometimes dream of using the rifle—a dream, indeed, to a man who can with difficulty drag himself across a field."

In June he writes to his friend, Mr. C. P. Scott, of the *Manchester Guardian*:

"Since I last wrote to you I have been very seriously ill. The starvation went on and on, and no one could relieve it, till I had to stay in the bedroom, and finally went to bed, fainting nearly all day and night, and yet craving for food, half delirious, and in the most dreadful state. How I endured I cannot tell. At last I had Dr. Kidd down from London, and in forty-eight hours his treatment checked the disease. I got downstairs, next, out of doors in a Bath-chair, and now I can walk two hundred yards. But I am still the veriest shadow of a man—my nerves are gone to pieces—and he warns me that it will take months to effect a cure. Of that, however, he is certain. Under his advice I have left Eltham, and am staying here (Rotherfield, Sussex) till a cottage can be found for me near Tunbridge Wells. . . . My last piece of MS. appears in *Longman* this month, and I have now no more left, having exhausted all I wrote when able. At least, there remains but one piece—'Nature in the Louvre.' It is about a beautiful statue that interested me greatly, and which seems to have escaped

notice in England. I think you would like the ideas expressed in it."

At this time it was suggested that he should make an application to the Royal Literary Fund. He writes both to Mr. Longman and to Mr. Scott in the strongest terms upon the subject. I do not, for my own part, in the least agree with Jefferies in his wholesale condemnation of that useful society, and therefore have the less hesitation in printing what he says of it:

'August 18, 1885.

"You have put before me a very great temptation. It is impossible for you to know how great, for there can be no doubt that it is the winter that is my enemy. Last winter I was indoors six months—in fact, it was eight before I really got out of doors, most of this time helpless, sitting in an easy-chair before the fire, my feet on a pillow, and legs wrapped up in a railway-rug, up and down stairs on hands and knees, and unable even to dress myself. Even now it tears me to pieces even

to walk a short distance. So that to pass next winter in warmth seems almost like life, besides the great possibility of complete recovery. There would be also the pleasure of the sights and scenes of Algiers or South Africa. In short, it has been a very great temptation, and I am sure it was most kind of you to think of me. But the Royal Literary Fund is a thing to accept aid from which humiliates the recipient past all bounds; it is worse than the workhouse. If long illness ultimately drove me to the workhouse, I should feel no disgrace, having done my utmost to fight with difficulties. Everyone has a right to that last relief. If this fund were maintained by pressmen, authors, journalists, editors, publishers, newspaper proprietors, and so on, that would be quite another matter. There would be no humiliation—rather the contrary—and in time one might subscribe some day and help someone else. It is no such thing. It is kept up by dukes and marquises, lords and titled people, with a Prince at their head, and a vast quantity of trumpet-blowing, in order that these people may say they are patrons

of literature! Patrons of literature! Was there ever such a disgrace in the nineteenth century? Patrons of literature! The thing is simply abominable! I dare say if I were a town-born man I should not think so, but to me it wears an aspect of standing insult.

"No doubt we ought to combine—all who have ever touched a pen—then we could assist each other in a straightforward and manly way.

"The temptation to me is very great indeed, because there is no question that I have been slowly sinking for years for want of some such travel or stimulus working through the nervous system. But I have made up my mind to say no. I would rather run the risk of quitting this world altogether next winter than degrade myself in that way.

"I am trying all I can to move altogether to the neighbourhood of the sea. Possibly, even Dorset or Devon might answer; or, failing that, I may try to pay a short visit to Schwalbach, and see if the natural iron medicine of a mineral spring may do what compound physic cannot. But I fancy the sea residence would be preferable.

"Change is the only thing that as yet has affected me, which seems to point conclusively to an exhausted system rather than to disease."

To Mr. Scott he writes in a similar strain. It galls him to think of being "patronized," and, indeed, if that were the view taken by the council of the Royal Literary Fund, I, for one, should be the first to agree with him. But it is not. Jefferies was wrong about the supporters of the Fund which is, in fact, assisted by everybody who ever makes any success in literature, and by every writer of any distinction either in letters or in other fields. He adds, however, a paragraph in which I cordially agree, and to the carrying out of the suggestion contained in it some of us have, during the last three years, devoted a great deal of time and effort.

"We ought, of course, to have a real Literary Association, to which subscription should be almost semi-compulsory. We ought to have some organization. Literature is young yet—

scarce fifty years old. The legal and medical professions have had a start of a thousand years. Our profession is young yet, but will be the first of all in the time to come."

He goes on to speak of his health:

"Ever since Christmas I have been trying to move to the sea-coast, but I cannot effect it. I cannot stick to work long enough to produce any result, the extreme weakness will not let me, so that I cannot do anything. Whatever I wish to do, it seems as if a voice said, 'No, you shall not do it. Feebleness forbids.' I think I should like a good walk. No. I think I should like to write. No. I think I should like to rest. No. Always No to everything. Even writing this letter has made the spine ache almost past endurance. I cannot convey to you how miserable it is to be impotent; to feel yourself full of ideas and work, and to be unable to effect anything; to sit and waste the hours. It is absolutely maddening."

In November he writes again. He is at Crowborough, where the fine air at first seemed

to be restoring him. He could walk about in the field at the back of the house.

"Suddenly I went down as if I had been shot. All the improvement was lost, and now I have been indoors three months, steadily becoming weaker and more emaciated every day. It is, in fact, starvation. They cannot feed me, try what they will. No one would believe what misery it is, and what extreme debility it produces. The worst of all is the helplessness. Often I am compelled to sit or lie for days and think, think, till I feel as if I should become insane, for my mind seems as clear as ever, and the anxiety and eager desire to do something is as strong as in my best days. There is an ancient story of a living man tied to a dead one, and that is like me; mind alive and body dead. I fear that my old friends will give me up in time, because I cannot travel the path of friendship now, and the Cymric proverb says that it soon grows covered with briars."

A letter, dated June 19, 1886, is too sad to

be quoted. His dependence on others, even for the putting on of his clothes, his longing for the sea-coast, which he thinks is certain to do him good, his lament over the poverty which, through no fault of his own, has fallen upon him, fill up this melancholy letter. Day and night there is no cessation of pain.

Help of all kinds was forthcoming from friends whom one must not name: money, the offer of a house on the sea-coast; but there was the difficulty of travelling. How was he to be moved? This difficulty was got over, and he went to Bexhill for a time, returning to Crowborough in September. The sea had done him good. On the night of his return, he enjoyed a tranquil sleep for some hours, and awoke without pain.

Among the letters sent to me by Mr. Scott is one from a well-known physician who had been consulted on the case.

"There is no doubt," he says, "that there is some tuberculous affection of his lungs, though, so far as I have been able to make

out, this does not seem to be at all in an active state.

"The serious complaints which make his life a misery to him I believe to be purely functional. He strikes me as being a very marked example of hysteria in man, though in his case, as in many among women, the commoner phenomena of hysteria are absent. I am surprised to hear that he spoke warmly of my treatment, for he would not admit to his ordinary attendant, nor to me, that his symptoms had undergone any palliation whatever. He is prejudiced against any treatment, and the result, according to him, always agrees with his prediction."

Evidently an extremely difficult and nervous patient to treat. But that might be expected. In October of 1886, Mr. Scott proposed to raise a fund among the friends and admirers of his works which should be devoted to sending him to a warmer climate. He consented, though with pain and bitterness of soul. "I have written," he says, "fourteen books." He enumerates them. "Scarcely anyone living

has done so much." Yet he forgets to consider for how small and select an audience he has written. "All of them have been praised by the reviews. I cannot help feeling it hard, after so much work, to come to such disgrace." It was hard, it was cruelly hard. While the pensions of the Civil List—a breach of trust if ever there was one — are bestowed upon daughters of distinguished officers and widows of civil servants, such a man as Jefferies, for whose assistance the grant is yearly asked and voted, is left to starve. It is indeed cruelly hard on literature that the rulers of the country should be so blind, so deaf, so pitiless—so dishonest. They made Burns a gauger. Well: that was something. Could they not have made Jefferies a police-constable, for instance? They gave him nothing: it would have been useless to ask any Government to give anything: they wanted all the money for persons for whom it was never intended. There never has been—there is not now—not even at a time when Prime Ministers and ex-Cabinet Ministers write articles for monthly magazines, any Government which has had the least concern

for, knowledge of, or touch with, literature, or its makers. Authors must develop and increase their own Society, and then they will not have to ask the Government for any Civil Pension list at all, and ministers may go on asking for the grant for the support of science and letters, and giving it all to their own creatures, and to the daughters, widows, and sisters of officers. It is hard, it is cruelly hard, as Jefferies said : it is a hardship and a disgrace to all of us that such a man as Jefferies should " come to such disgrace."

Well, the fund was raised, quietly, among the private friends of its promoters. But it came too late for the Algerian or South African expedition. The sick man was sent, however, to the seaside ; to a house at Goring, on the Sussex coast. From this place he wrote to Mr. Scott a little history of his illness, the nature of which I have already sketched. The description by a highly-sensitive man, then in a most nervous condition, of the horrible pain which he had been enduring is most terrible to read, and is altogether too terrible to be quoted. I dare not quote the

whole of this dreadful story of long-continued agony. Take, however, the end of it. At last his wounds were somehow made to heal.

"Now imagine my joy. The wounds were well at last. I was free. I could walk and sit—actually sit down. I could work. I was very faint and ill, but fresh air would soon set that right. All these expenses had swallowed up a large share of my savings, and I had practically to begin life again. But I did not mind that. I went to work joyously.

"Now judge again of my disappointment. Within two months — in February — I was seized with a mysterious wasting disease, accompanied by much pain. I gradually wasted away to mere bones. By degrees this pain increased till it became almost insupportable. I can compare it to nothing but the flame of a small spirit lamp continually burning within me. Sometimes it seemed like a rat always gnaw, gnaw, night and day. I had no sleep. Everything I ate or drank seemed to add fuel to the flame. The local doctors could do nothing, so I went to London again, and in

the course of the two years and more that it lasted I was under five of the leading London physicians. Altogether I had some forty prescriptions, and took something like sixty drugs, besides being put on diet. It was not the slightest use, and it became evident that they had no idea what was really the matter with me. The pain went on, burn, burn, burn. If I wrote a volume I could not describe it to you, this terrible scorching pain, night and day. There is nothing in medical books like it, except the pain that follows corrosive sublimate which burns the tissues. It was at times so maddening that I dreaded to go a few miles alone by rail lest I should throw myself out of the window of the carriage. I worked and wrote all this time, and some of my best work was done in this intense agony. I received letters from New Zealand, from the United States, even from the islands of the Pacific, from people who had read my writings. It seemed so strange that I should read these letters, and yet all the time to be writhing in agony.

"At last, in April, 1885, nature gave way,

and I broke down utterly, and could only lie on the sofa in a fainting condition. In a few days I became so helpless and weak that there appeared little chance of my living. Someone suggested that Dr. Kidd should be sent for. He came on Sunday morning, and found me nearly ended. I was fainting during the examination. He discovered that it was ulceration of the intestines. You know how painful an ulcer is anywhere—say on your lip—now for over two years this ulceration had been burning its way in the intestines.

"He put me on milk diet, malt bread, malt extract, malted food, meat shredded and pounded in a mortar, raw beef, and so on. In forty-eight hours the pain was better. For three weeks I improved and hoped. I think that had the diet been then altered to the ordinary food, I might have made a recovery; instead of which it was kept up for nine weeks, at the end of which I had lost all the improvement, and was so weak that I could but just crawl up and down stairs. I attribute my subsequent exhaustion to the continued use

of milk, which has the effect of destroying nervous energy."

'Oct. 22, 1886.

"I have been obliged to set all aside from extreme feebleness. During the last four weeks, indeed, the weakness and emaciation have become very great, so much so that I almost fancy the bones waste. But what I feel most is the loss of fresh air from inability to go out. The last two days have been dry, so that I have been able to get up and down by the house a little.

"Still, I should have managed somehow to write to you were it not for the great dislike I feel to this begging business. You must not take offence at this, though you may think me very foolish. I keep putting it off and putting it off, till now I suppose I must do it, or stay the winter indoors in helplessness. To-day I have written to obtain the information necessary to fill up the form you sent.

"In September, 1885, my spine seemed suddenly to snap. It happened in ten minutes—quite suddenly. It felt as if one

of the vertebræ had been taken away. It was no doubt a form of paralysis. I had to take to the sofa again, and was confined to the house for over seven months, quite helpless. I could not undress myself. At Christmas, other troubles set in; the local doctor gave me up. He told my wife that nothing could be done for me, and that the only hope was in my keeping in good spirits. The misery of that dreadful winter will never be forgotten. At length nature seemed to revive a little, and I got downstairs, and soon after Miss Scott came to see me, and you sent me to the sea. On returning from the sea I slowly lost ground again. In the summer I had an attack of vomiting blood—of itself enough to alarm most people. By October I was confined indoors again. At last I got down here.

"Besides all these sufferings I had another trial—a loss by death—one that I cannot dwell upon;"—it was the death of his youngest child—"but it broke me down very much.

"Of the loss of all my savings I need not say much. But it is difficult to begin the

world afresh"—alas! he was just about to end the world—"even with good health.

"With truth I think I may say that there are few, very few, perhaps none, living who have gone through such a series of diseases. There are many dead—many who have killed themselves for a tenth part of the pain—there are few living.

"My wearied and exhausted system constantly craves rest. My brain is always asking for rest. I never sleep. I have not slept now for five years properly, always waking, with broken bits of sleep, and restlessness, and in the morning I get up more weary than I went to bed. Rest, that is what I need. You thought naturally that it was work I needed; but I have been at work, and next time I will tell you all of it. It is not work, it is *rest* for the brain and the nervous system. I have always had a suspicion that it was the ceaseless work that caused me to go wrong at first.

"It has taken me a long time to write this letter; it will take you but a few minutes to read it. Had you not sent me to the sea in

the spring I do not think that I should have been alive to write it."

Was there ever a more miserable tale of slow torture? Parts of it—the parts relating to his operations—I have omitted. Enough remains. Picture to yourself this tall, gaunt man reduced to a skeleton, not able to use his pen for more than a few minutes at a time, his spine broken down, spitting blood, lying back on the sofa, his mind full of splendid thoughts which he *cannot* put upon paper, dictating sometimes when he was strong enough, resolved on making money so as to save himself the "disgrace" of applying to the Literary Fund, full of pain by day and night, growing daily weaker, but never losing heart or hope—is there in the whole calamitous history of authors a picture more full of sadness and of pity than this?

He writes again on January 10, 1887. He is no worse. The letter is about money matters —that is to say, he has no money.

On February 2 he writes again. He has been able to dictate a little.

"I hope to be able to do more work after a time; when the weather becomes sufficiently warm for me to sit out of doors. With me the power to write is almost entirely dependent upon being out of doors. Confined indoors, I have nothing to write, and I cannot express my ideas if they do occur to me so boldly. You have no idea what a difference it makes. A little air and movement seem to brighten up the mind and give it play. I am in hope, too, that as the warmth comes on the sea will help me more. Up to the present the winter has gone well."

The last letter to Mr. Scott was written on March 23. He is pleased and surprised to hear that the fund raised for him amounts to so much. Perhaps it will enable him to go abroad presently. Meantime, he has had a relapse—an attack of hæmorrhage—"and then so feeble that I have not been able to dictate. This loss of time worries me more than I can tell you."

And so with thanks to this good friend, Richard Jefferies lays down his pen for the

last time. The busy hand which has written so much will write no more. He can no longer dictate. His very feebleness will soon be past, and he will be at rest, whether in the unconscious clay-cold rest of the dark grave, or in that better life of the Fuller Soul of which he had so great and glorious a Vision—who knoweth?

You have read the life of Richard Jefferies. You have seen how the country lad, ill-educated, slenderly provided with books or friends, formed in early life a resolution to succeed in letters. The resolution was formed when as yet he had no knowledge or thought of style. You have read how he fought long years against ill-success, against the ridicule and coldness of his friends, but still kept up his courage; how he did succeed at length, yet not at all in the way that at first he hoped. That way would have taken him along the paths trodden by those who write romances and stories to beguile their brothers and sisters, and to cheat them into forgetfulness of their disappointments and anxieties; that way, by which he wished to go, would have

led him quickly to the ease of fortune which at all times he ardently desired. It is foolish, and worse than foolish, to pretend that any man—even the best of men, even the most philosophic of men—desires poverty, which is dependence; therefore one does not blame this man for desiring fortune. The way, however, by which he succeeded was a far higher and a nobler way, though he understood not that at first.

You have seen, also, not only that his early life was that of an obscure reporter for a little country paper, but that his first ambition was altogether for the making of money rather than for the production of good work. The love of good work, as such, grew gradually in him. At first it is not apparent at all. At first we have nothing but a commonplace lad, poor, and therefore eager to make money, and fondly thinking that it can be made by writing worthless and commonplace stories. Nothing in his early life has been concealed. You have read his very words, where they could be recovered. They are in no way remarkable words; they are generally, in fact, common-

place. Nothing, except a steady and consistent belief in his own future, the nature of which he does not even suspect, reveals the power latent in his mind. There is nothing at all in these early utterances to show the depths of poetry in his soul. Nay, I think there were none of these depths in him at first. So long as he worked among men, and contemplated their ways, he felt no touch of poetry, he saw no gleam of light. Mankind seemed to him sordid and creeping; either oppressor or oppressed. Away from men, upon the breezy down and among the woods, he is filled with thoughts which, at first, vanish like the photographs of scenery upon the eye. Presently he finds out the way to fix those photographs. Then he is transformed, but not suddenly; no, not suddenly. When he discovers the Gamekeeper at Home, he begins to be articulate; with every page that follows he becomes more articulate. At first he draws a faithful picture of the cottager, the farmer, the gamekeeper, the poacher; the pictures are set in appropriate scenery; by degrees the figures vanish and the setting remains. But it is

no longer the same; it is now infused with the very soul of the painter. The woods speak to us, through him; the very flowers speak and touch our hearts, through him. The last seven years of his life were full, indeed, of pain and bodily torture; but they were glorified and hallowed by the work which he was enabled to do. Nay, they even glorify and hallow all the life that went before. We no longer see the commonplace young country reporter who tries to write commonplace and impossible stories — we watch the future poet of the "Pageant of Summer" whose early struggles we witness while he is seeking to find himself. Presently he speaks. HE HAS FOUND HIMSELF; he has obtained the prayer of his heart; he has been blessed with the FULLER SOUL.

At the last, during the long communings of the night when he lay sleepless, happy to be free, if only for a few moments, from pain, the simple old faith came back to him. He had arrived long before, as we have seen, at the grand discovery: that the perfect soul wants the perfect body, and that the perfect

body must be inhabited by the perfect soul. To this conclusion, you have seen, he was led by Nature herself. Now he beheld clearly—perhaps more clearly than ever—the way from this imperfect and fragmentary life to a fuller, happier life beyond the grave. He had no need of priest; he wanted no other assurance than the voice and words of Him who swept away all priests. The man who wrote the "Story of My Heart;" the man who was filled to overflowing with the beauty and order of God's handiwork; the man who felt so deeply the shortness, and imperfections, and disappointments of life that he was fain to cry aloud that all happens by chance; the man who had the vision of the Fuller Soul, died listening with faith and love to the words contained in the Old Book.

What follows is written by his friend, Mr. J. W. North, who was with him during the last days.

"It was in the early summer, two or three months before his death, that I saw Jefferies for

the last time alive. He had then been living at Goring for some short time, and this was my first visit to him there. I was pleased to find that his house was far pleasanter than the dreary and bleak cottage which he had rented at Crowborough. It had a view of the sea, a warm southern exposure, and a good and interesting garden: in one corner a quaint little arbour, with a pole and vane, and near the centre a genuine old-fashioned draw-well. Poor fellow! Painfully, with short breathing, and supported on one side by Mrs. Jefferies and on the other by myself, he walked round this enclosure, noticing and drawing our attention to all kinds of queer little natural objects and facts. Between the well and the arbour was a heap of rough, loose stones, overgrown by various creeping flowers. This was the home of a common snake, discovered there by Harold, and poor Jefferies stood, supported by us, a yard or so away and peered into every little cranny and under every leaf with eyes well used to such a search until some tiny gleam, some minute cold glint of light, betrayed the snake. Weak-

ness and pain seemed forgotten for the moment —alas! only for the moment. Uneasily he sat in the little arbour telling me how his disease seemed still to puzzle the doctors; how he felt well able in mind to work, plenty of mental energy, but so weak, *so fearfully weak*, that he could no longer write with his own hand; that his wife was patient and good to help him. He had nobody to come and talk with him of the world of literature and art. Why couldn't I come and settle by? There was plenty to paint. Though Goring itself was one of the ugliest places in the world, there was Arundel, and its noble park, and river, and castle close by. I must go and see it the very next day, and see whether I could not work there, and come back every day and cheer him. I was the best doctor, after all.'

"Poor fellow! I did not then know or believe that he was so utterly without sympathetic society except his devoted wife. It was so. I am one of the dullest companions in the world; but I had sympathy with his work, and knowledge, too, of his subjects. Well, nothing would do but that I must go to

Arundel the next day, and Mrs. Jefferies must show me the town. 'He would do well enough for one day. A good neighbour would come in, and with little Phyllis and the maid he would be safe.'

"Therefore we went to Arundel (a short journey by train), and on coming back found him standing against the door-post to welcome us.

"I have seldom been more touched than by my experience of that evening, finding, amongst other things, that he had partly planned and insisted on this Arundel trip to get us away so that he might, unrebuked, spend some of his latest hard earnings in a pint of 'Perrier Jouet' for my supper.

"Do you know Goring churchyard? It is one of those dreary, over-crowded, dark spots where the once-gravelled paths are green with slimy moss, and it was a horror to poor Jefferies. More than once he repeated the hope that he might not be laid there, and he chose the place where his widow at last left him—amongst the brighter grass and flowers at Broadwater.

"He died at Goring at half-past two on Sunday morning, August 14, 1887. His soul was released from a body wasted to a skeleton by six long weary years of illness. For nearly two years he had been too weak to write, and all his delightful work, during that period, was written by his wife from his dictation. Who can picture the torture of these long years to him, denied as he was the strength to walk so much as one hundred yards in the world he loved so well? What hero like this, fighting with Death face to face so long, fearing and knowing, alas! too well, that no struggles could avail, and, worse than all, that his dear ones would be left friendless and penniless. Thus died a man whose name will be first, perhaps for ever, in his own special work."

"Monday, Aug., 15.

". . . I went yesterday, expecting once more to speak with him. I found him lying *dead, twelve hours dead.* I saw him with Mrs. Jefferies and their little Phyllis. A pitiful sight to see them kiss the poor cold face! God help them! All through his last

days his wife was with him *day and night*; a young country girl, who behaved nobly all through, was her only help. . . . His long, long illness of six years (four years before at Eltham he looked near death)—this long, wearisome time had almost persuaded many who knew him not intimately that his illness was partly imaginary. He proved it otherwise. A soldier who in health, high spirits, and excitement, rides to what appears certain death is called a hero: glory and honours are heaped upon him; but what is that compared with years of fighting without cessation, and the *absolute certainty* of defeat always present to the mind? I asked Mrs. Jefferies if he had made a will. She said: 'No; surely it would have been useless, we have nothing. A woman singly, strong as I am, could rough it; but if something can be done for the children—' Something shall be done. I had to call at my framemaker's to put off an appointment. I told him roughly what had happened to me yesterday. He had never heard of Jefferies, and knew nothing of his work; but he said, 'I shall be glad if anything can be done if

you will put us down for two guineas.' All those who are country born and bred, and have a heart inside their body, have always recognised and admired poor Jefferies' writing. Shall I say what I think and *know*, that in all our literature until now he has never had a rival, and that it is most likely he will never be equalled? In a hundred years he will be only more truly appreciated than at present. The number of men who combine the love and the knowledge of literary work is more limited, perhaps, in this age than in any previous one. Few people, again, of intelligence and refinement of heart and mind live completely in the country, and much, very much of his work, will be always unintelligible to those who cannot exist in a country-house unless it is full of frequently-changing guests. I have been trying by a different art for thirty years—equal to almost the whole of his life on earth—to convey an idea to others of some such subjects, and I feel with shame that in the work of half a year I do not get so near the heart and truth of Nature as he in one

paragraph. With strict charge that it should not leave my hands, Mrs. Jefferies lent me the proof of an article which appeared in *Longman's Magazine* in spring, 1886. It was the very last copy he wrote with his own hand. Since then his wife wrote from his dictation. Read this quotation from it, which touched me greatly yesterday :

"'I wonder to myself how they can all get on without me; how they manage, bird and flower, without ME, to keep the calendar for them. For I noted it so carefully and lovingly day by day.'

"And this :

"'They go on without me, orchis-flower and cowslip. I cannot number them all. I hear, as it were, the patter of their feet—flower and buds, and the beautiful clouds that go over, with the sweet rush of rain and burst of sun glory among the leafy trees. They go on, and I am no more than the least of the empty shells that strew the sward of the hill.'

"One thing I saw in one of his last note-books: 'Three great giants are against me—disease, despair, and poverty.'

"One thing more. His wife said that their time had been for long spent in prayer together and reading St. Luke.

"Almost his last intelligible words were, 'Yes, yes; that is so. Help, Lord, for Jesus' sake. Darling, good-bye. God bless you and the children, and save you all from such great pain.'

"He was buried at Broadwater, by Worthing, Sussex.

"In the gentlest, sweet, soft, sunny rain he was borne along the path to his grave in the grass, and when the last part of the service for the dead had been read, well and solemnly, and we turned away leaving him for ever on earth, the large tears from heaven fell thick and fast, and over and over again came to me the saying, 'Happy are the dead that the rain rains on.' The modest home-made wreath of wild wood-clematis and myrtle my wife had

sent pleased me by happy symbolism—for as the myrtle is, so will his memory be, 'for ever green.'

"Mourn, little harebells, o'er the lea ;
Ye stately foxgloves fair to see ;
Ye woodbines hanging bonnilie
In scented bowers ;
Ye roses on your thorny tree,
The first o' flowers.

"Mourn, Spring, thou darling of the year ;
Ilk cowslip-cup shall kep a tear ;
Thou Summer, while each corny spear
Shoots up its head,
Thy gay, green, flowery tresses shear
For him that's dead."

"J. W. N."

APPENDIX I.

LIST OF JEFFERIES' WORKS.

(*The Dates of the First Editions only are given.*)

Reporting, Editing and Authorship. John Snow and Co., Ivy Lane; Alfred Bull, Victoria Street, Swindon, 1873. Handbook.

A Memoir of the Goddards of North Wilts. Published by the author, Coate, Swindon, 1873.

Jack Brass, Emperor of England. T. Pettit, and Co., 23, Frith Street, Soho, 1873. Pamphlet.

The Scarlet Shawl. Tinsley Bros., 1874. 1 vol. novel.

Restless Human Hearts. Tinsley Bros., 1875. 3 vols.

Suez-cide. John Snow and Co., Ivy Lane, 1876. Pamphlet.

World's End. Tinsley Bros., 1877. 3 vols.

Game-Keeper at Home. Smith and Elder, 1878. 1 vol.

Amateur Poacher. Smith and Elder, 1881.

Wild Life in a Southern County. Smith and Elder, 1879. 1 vol.

GREENE FERNE FARM. Smith and Elder, 1880. 1 vol.

HODGE AND HIS MASTERS. Smith and Elder, 1880. 2 vols.

ROUND ABOUT A GREAT ESTATE. Smith and Elder, 1880. 1 vol.

WOOD MAGIC. Cassell, 1881. 1 vol.

BEVIS. Sampson Low and Co., 1882. 3 vols.

NATURE NEAR LONDON. Chatto and Windus, 1883. 1 vol.

STORY OF MY HEART. Longmans, 1883. 1 vol.

THE DEWY MORN. Chapman and Hall, 1884. 2 vol. novel.

LIFE OF THE FIELDS. Chatto and Windus, 1884. 1 vol.

RED-DEER. Longmans, 1884. 1 vol.

AFTER LONDON. Cassell, 1885. 1 vol.

THE OPEN AIR. Chatto and Windus, 1885. 1 vol.

AMARYLLIS AT THE FAIR. Sampson Low and Co., 1887. 1 vol.

APPENDIX II.

LIST OF PAPERS STILL UNPUBLISHED.

My Old Village. *Longman's Magazine*, October, 1887.

Hours of Spring. *Longman's Magazine*, 1885.

April Gossip. *St. James's Gazette.*

Some April Sweets. *Pall Mall Gazette.*

The Makers of Summer. *Pall Mall Gazette.*

Walks in the Wheatfields. *English Illustrated Magazine.*

Somerset in June. *English Illustrated Magazine*, October, 1887.

Birds' Nests. *St. James's Gazette.*

Field Sports in Art. *Art Journal.*

Nature in the Louvre. *Magazine of Art.*

Nature and Books. *Fortnightly Review.*

Buckhurst Park. *Standard.*

Country Places. *Manchester Guardian.*

The July Grass. *Pall Mall Gazette.*

The Country-side. *Manchester Guardian.*

Winds of Heaven. *Chambers' Journal.*

The Country Sunday. *Longman's Magazine*, June, 1887.

Swallow-Time. *Standard.*

HOUSE-MARTINS. *Standard.*
AMONG THE NUTS. *Standard.*
LOCALITY AND NATURE. *Pall Mall Gazette.*
FIELD WORDS AND WAYS. *Chambers' Journal.*
COTTAGE IDEAS. *Chambers' Journal.*
STEAM ON COUNTRY ROADS. *Standard.*
THE TIME OF YEAR. *Pall Mall Gazette.*
MIXED DAYS OF MAY AND DECEMBER. *Pall Mall Gazette.*
JUST BEFORE WINTER. *Chambers' Journal.*
MY CHAFFINCH. *Pall Mall Gazette.*

APPENDIX III.

LETTER TO THE *TIMES*, NOVEMBER, 1872.

Sir,—The Wiltshire agricultural labourer is not so highly paid as those of Northumberland, nor so low as those of Dorset; but in the amount of his wages, as in intelligence and general position, he may fairly be taken as an average specimen of his class throughout a large portion of the kingdom.

As a man, he is usually strongly built, broad-shouldered, and massive in frame, but his appearance is spoilt by the clumsiness of his walk and the want of grace in his movements. Though quite as large in muscle, it is very doubtful if he possesses the strength of the seamen who may be seen lounging about the ports. There is a want of firmness, a certain disjointed style, about his limbs, and the muscles themselves have not the hardness and tension of the sailor's. The labourer's muscle is that of a cart-horse, his motions lumbering and slow. His style of walk is caused by following the plough in early childhood, when the weak limbs find it a hard labour to pull the heavy-nailed boots from the thick clay soil. Ever afterwards he walks as if it were an exertion to lift his legs. His food may, perhaps, have something to

do with the deadened slowness which seems to pervade everything he does — there seems a lack of vitality about him. It consists chiefly of bread and cheese, with bacon twice or thrice a week, varied with onions, and if he be a milker (on some farms) with a good "tuck-out" at his employer's expense on Sundays. On ordinary days he dines at the fashionable hour of six or seven in the evening—that is, about that time his cottage scents the road with a powerful odour of boiled cabbage, of which he eats an immense quantity. Vegetables are his luxuries, and a large garden, therefore, is the greatest blessing he can have. He eats huge onions raw; he has no idea of flavouring his food with them, nor of making those savoury and inviting messes or vegetable soups at which the French peasantry are so clever. In Picardy I have often dined in a peasant's cottage, and thoroughly enjoyed the excellent soup he puts upon the table for his ordinary meal. To dine in an English labourer's cottage would be impossible. His bread is generally good, certainly; but his bacon is the cheapest he can buy at small second-class shops—oily, soft, wretched stuff; his vegetables are cooked in detestable style, and eaten saturated with the pot-liquor. Pot-liquor is a favourite soup. I have known cottagers actually apply at farmers' kitchens, not only for the pot-liquor in which meat has been soddened, but for the water in which potatoes have been boiled—potato-liquor—and sup it up with avidity. And this not in times of dearth or scarcity, but rather as a relish. They never buy anything but bacon; never butcher's meat. Philanthropic ladies, to my knowledge, have demonstrated over and over again even to their limited capa-

cities that certain parts of butchers' meat can be bought just as cheap, and will make more savoury and nutritive food; and even now, with the present high price of meat, a certain portion would be advantageous. In vain; the labourers obstinately adhere to the pig, and the pig only. When, however, an opportunity does occur, the amount of food they will eat is something astonishing. Once a year, at the village club dinner, they gormandize to repletion. In one instance I knew of a man eating a plate of roast beef (and the slices are cut enormously thick at these dinners), a plate of boiled beef, then another of boiled mutton, and then a fourth of roast mutton, and a fifth of ham. He said he could not do much to the bread and cheese; but didn't he go into the pudding! I have even heard of men stuffing to the fullest extent of their powers, and then retiring from the table to take an emetic of mustard and return to a second gorging. There is scarcely any limit to their power of absorbing beer. I have known reapers and mowers make it their boast that they could lie on their backs and never take the wooden bottle (in the shape of a small barrel) from their lips till they had drunk a gallon, and from the feats I have seen I verily believe it a fact. The beer they get is usually poor and thin, though sometimes in harvest the farmers bring out a taste of strong liquor, but not till the work is nearly over; for from this very practice of drinking enormous quantities of small beer the labourer cannot drink more than a very limited amount of good liquor without getting tipsy. This is why he so speedily gets inebriated at the alehouse. While mowing and reaping many of them lay in a small cask.

They are much better clothed now than formerly. Corduroy trousers and slops are the usual style. Smock-frocks are going out of use, except for milkers and faggers. Almost every labourer has his Sunday suit, very often really good clothes, sometimes glossy black, with the regulation "chimney-pot." His unfortunate walk betrays him, dress how he will. Since labour has become so expensive it has become a common remark among the farmers that the labourer will go to church in broadcloth and the masters in smock-frocks. The labourer never wears gloves—that has to come with the march of the times; but he is particularly choice over his necktie. The women must dress in the fashion. A very respectable draper in an agricultural district was complaining to me the other day that the poorest class of women would have everything in the fashionable style, let it change as often as it would. In former times, if he laid in a stock of goods suited to tradesmen, and farmers' wives and daughters, if the fashion changed, or they got out of date, he could dispose of them easily to the servants. Now no such thing. The quality did not matter so much, but the style must be the style of the day—no sale for remnants. The poorest girl, who had not got two yards of flannel on her back, must have the same style of dress as the squire's daughter—Dolly Vardens, chignons, and parasols for ladies who can work all day reaping in the broiling sun of August! Gloves, kid, for hands that milk the cows!

The cottages now are infinitely better than they were. There is scarcely room for further improvement in the cottages now erected upon estates. They have three bedrooms, and every appliance and comfort com-

patible with their necessarily small size. It is only the cottages erected by the labourers themselves on waste plots of ground which are open to objection. Those he builds himself are indeed, as a rule, miserable huts, disgraceful to a Christian country. I have an instance before me at this moment where a man built a cottage with two rooms and no staircase or upper apartments, and in those two rooms eight persons lived and slept—himself and wife, grown-up daughters, and children. There was not a scrap of garden attached, not enough to grow half a dozen onions. The refuse and sewage was flung into the road, or filtered down a ditch into the brook which supplied that part of the village with water. In another case at one time there was a cottage in which twelve persons lived. This had upper apartments, but so low was the ceiling that a tall man could stand on the floor, with his head right through the opening for the staircase, and see along the upper floor under the beds! These squatters are the curse of the community. It is among them that fever and kindred infectious diseases break out; it is among them that wretched couples are seen bent double with rheumatism and affections of the joints caused by damp. They have often been known to remain so long, generation after generation, in these wretched hovels that at last the lord of the manor having neglected to claim quit-rent, they can defy him, and claim them as their own property, and there they stick, eyesores and blots, the fungi of the land. The cottages erected by farmers or by landlords are now, one and all, fit and proper habitations for human beings; and I verily believe it would be impossible throughout the length

and breadth of Wiltshire to find a single bad cottage on any large estate, so well and so thoroughly have the landed proprietors done their work. On all farms gardens are attached to the cottages, in many instances very large, and always sufficient to produce enough vegetables for the resident. In villages the allotment system has been greatly extended of late years, and has been found most beneficial, both to owners and tenants. As a rule the allotments are let at a rate which may be taken as £4 per annum—a sum which pays the landlord very well, and enables the labourer to remunerate himself. In one village which came under my observation the clergyman of the parish has turned a portion of his glebe-land into allotments—a most excellent and noble example, which cannot be too widely followed or too much extolled. He is thus enabled to benefit almost every one of his poor parishioners, and yet without destroying that sense of independence which is the great characteristic of a true Englishman. He has issued a book of rules and conditions under which these allotments are held, and he thus places a strong check upon drunkenness and dissolute habits, indulgence in which is a sure way to lose the portions of ground. There is scarcely an end to the benefits of the allotment system. In villages there cannot be extensive gardens, and the allotments supply their place. The extra produce above that which supplies the table and pays the rent is easily disposed of in the next town, and places many additional comforts in the labourer's reach. The refuse goes to help support and fatten the labourer's pig, which brings him in profit enough to pay the rent of his cottage, and the pig, in turn,

manures the allotment. Some towns have large common lands, held under certain conditions; such are Malmesbury, with 500 acres, and Tetbury (the common land of which extends two miles): both these being arable, etc. These are not exactly in the use of labourers, but they are in the hands of a class to which the labourer often rises. Many labourers have fruit trees in their gardens which, in some seasons, prove very profitable. In the present year, to my knowledge, a labourer sold £4 worth of apples; and another made £3 10s. of the produce of one pear-tree, pears being scarce.

To come at last to the difficult question of wages. In Wiltshire there has been no extended strike, and very few meetings upon the subject, for the simple reason that the agitators can gain no hold upon a county where, as a mass, the labourers are well paid. The common day-labourer receives 10s., 11s., and 12s. a week, according to the state of supply and demand for labour in various districts, and, if he milks, 1s. more, making 13s. a week, now common wages. These figures are rather below the mark; I could give instances of much higher pay. To give a good idea of the wages paid, I will take the case of a hill farmer (arable, Marlborough Downs), who paid this last summer during harvest 18s. per week per man. His reapers often earned 10s. a day; enough to pay their year's rent in a week. These men lived in cottages on the farm, with three bedrooms each, and some larger, with every modern appliance, each having a garden of a quarter of an acre attached and close at hand, for which cottage and garden they paid 1s. per week rent. The whole of these cottages were insured by the farmer himself,

their furniture, etc., in one lump, and the insurance policy cost him, as nearly as possible, 1s. 3d. per cottage per year. For this he deducted 1s. per year each from their wages. None of the men would have insured unless he had insisted upon doing it for them. These men had from six to eight quarts of beer per man (over and above their 18s. per week) during harvest every day. In spring and autumn their wages are much increased by forced work, hoeing, etc. In winter the farmer draws their coal for them in his waggons, a distance of eight miles from the nearest wharf, enabling them to get it at cost price. This is no slight advantage, for, at the present high price of coal, it is sold, delivered in the villages, at 2s. per cwt. Many who cannot afford it in the week buy a quarter of a cwt. on Saturday night to cook their Sunday's dinner with, for 6d. This is at the rate of £2 per ton. Another gentleman, a large steam cultivator in the Vale, whose name is often before the public, informs me that his books show that he paid £100 in one year in cash to one cottage for labour, showing the advantage the labourer possesses over the mechanic, since his wife and child can add to his income. Many farmers pay £50 and £60 a year for beer drunk by their labourers—a serious addition to their wages. The railway companies and others who employ mechanics do not allow them any beer. The allowance of a good cottage and a quarter of an acre of garden for 1s. per week is not singular. Many who were at the Autumn Manœuvres of the present year may remember having a handsome row of houses, rather than cottages, pointed out to them as inhabited by labourers at 1s. per week. In the immediate

neighbourhood of large manufacturing towns 1s. 6d. a week is sometimes paid; but then these cottages would in such positions readily let to mechanics for 3s., 4s., and even 5s. per week. There was a great outcry when the Duke of Marlborough issued an order that the cottages on his estate should in future only be let to such men as worked upon the farms where those cottages are situated. In reality this was the very greatest blessing the Duke could have conferred upon the agricultural labourer; for it insured him a good cottage at a nearly nominal rent and close to his work; whereas in many instances previously the cottages on the farms had been let at a high rate to the mechanics, and the labourer had to walk miles before he got to his labour. Cottages are not erected by landowners or by farmers as paying speculations. It is well known that the condition of things prevents the agricultural labourer from being able to pay a sufficient rent to be a fair percentage upon the sum expended. In one instance a landlord has built some cottages for his tenant, the tenant paying a certain amount of interest on the sum invested by the landlord. Now, although this is a matter of arrangement, and not of speculation —that is, although the interest paid by the tenant is a low percentage upon the money laid out, yet the rent paid by the labourers inhabiting these cottages to the tenant does not reimburse him what he pays his landlord as interest—not by a considerable margin. But then he has the advantage of his labourers close to his work, always ready at hand.

Over and above the actual cash wages of the labourer, which are now very good, must be reckoned his cottage and garden, and often a small orchard, at a

nominal rent, his beer at his master's expense, piece-work, gleaning after harvest, etc., which alter his real position very materially. In Gloucestershire, on the Cotswolds, the best-paid labourers are the shepherds, for in that great sheep country much trust is reposed in them. At the annual auctions of shearlings which are held upon the low farms a purse is made for the shepherd of the flock, into which everyone who attends is expected to drop a shilling, often producing £5. The shepherds on the Wiltshire downs are also well paid, especially in lambing time, when the greatest watchfulness and care are required. It has been stated that the labourer has no chance of rising from his position. This is sheer cant. He has very good opportunities of rising, and often does rise, to my knowledge. At this present moment I could mention a person who has risen from a position scarcely equal to that of a labourer, not only to have a farm himself, but to place his sons in farms. Another has just entered on a farm; and several more are on the high-road to that desirable consummation. If a labourer possesses any amount of intelligence he becomes head carter or head fagger, as the case may be; and from that to be assistant or underbailiff, and finally bailiff. As a bailiff he has every opportunity to learn the working of a farm, and is often placed in entire charge of a farm at a distance from his employer's residence. In time he establishes a reputation as a practical man, and being in receipt of good wages, with very little expenditure, saves some money. He has now little difficulty in obtaining the promise of a farm, and with this can readily take up money. With average care he is a made man. Others rise from petty trading,

petty dealing with pigs and calves, till they save sufficient to rent a small farm, and make that the basis of larger dealing operations. I question very much whether a clerk in a firm would not find it much more difficult, as requiring larger capital, to raise himself to a level with his employer than an agricultural labourer does to the level of a farmer.

Many labourers now wander far and wide as navvies, etc., and perhaps when these return home, as most of them do, to agricultural labour, they are the most useful and intelligent of their class, from a readiness they possess to turn their hand to anything. I know one at this moment who makes a large addition to his ordinary wages by brewing for the small inns, and very good liquor he brews, too. They pick up a large amount of practical knowledge.

The agricultural women are certainly not handsome; I know no peasantry so entirely uninviting. Occasionally there is a girl whose nut-brown complexion and sloe-black eyes are pretty, but their features are very rarely good, and they get plain quickly, so soon as the first flush of youth is past. Many have really good hair in abundance, glossy and rich, perhaps from its exposure to the fresh air. But on Sundays they plaster it with strong-smelling pomade and hair-oil, which scents the air for yards most unpleasantly. As a rule, it may safely be laid down that the agricultural women are moral, far more so than those of the town. Rough and rude jokes and language are, indeed, too common; but that is all. No evil comes of it. The fairs are the chief cause of immorality. Many an honest, hard-working servant-girl owes her ruin to these fatal mops and fairs, when

liquor to which she is unaccustomed overcomes her. Yet it seems cruel to take from them the one day or two of the year on which they can enjoy themselves fairly in their own fashion. The spread of friendly societies, patronized by the gentry and clergy, with their annual festivities, is a remedy which is gradually supplying them with safer, and yet congenial, amusement. In what may be termed lesser morals I cannot accord either them or the men the same praise. They are too ungrateful for the many great benefits which are bountifully supplied them—the brandy, the soup, and fresh meat readily extended without stint from the farmer's home in sickness to the cottage are too quickly forgotten. They who were most benefited are often the first to most loudly complain and to backbite. Never once in all my observation have I heard a labouring man or woman make a grateful remark; and yet I can confidently say that there is no class of persons in England who receive so many attentions and benefits from their superiors as the agricultural labourers. Stories are rife of their even refusing to work at disastrous fires because beer was not immediately forthcoming. I trust this is not true; but it is too much in character. No term is too strong in condemnation for those persons who endeavour to arouse an agitation among a class of people so short-sighted and so ready to turn against their own benefactors and their own interest. I am credibly informed that one of these agitators, immediately after the Bishop of Gloucester's unfortunate but harmlessly intended speech at the Gloucester Agricultural Society's dinner—one of these agitators mounted a platform at a village meeting and in plain language incited and ad-

vised the labourers to duck the farmers! The agricultural women either go out to field-work or become indoor servants. In harvest they hay-make—chiefly light work, as raking; and reap, which is much harder labour; but then, while reaping, they work their own time, as it is done by the piece. Significantly enough, they make longer hours while reaping. They are notoriously late to arrive, and eager to return home on the hayfield. The children help both in haymaking and reaping. In spring and autumn they hoe and do other piecework. On pasture farms they beat clots or pick up stones out of the way of the mowers' scythes. Occasionally, but rarely now, they milk. In winter they wear gaiters, which give the ankles a most ungainly appearance. Those who go out to service get very low wages at first from their extreme awkwardness, but generally quickly rise. As dairymaids they get very good wages indeed. Dairymaids are scarce and valuable. A dairymaid who can be trusted to take charge of a dairy will sometimes get £20 besides her board (liberal) and sundry perquisites. These often save money, marry bailiffs, and help their husbands to start a farm.

In the education provided for children Wiltshire compares favourably with other counties. Long before the passing of the recent Act in reference to education the clergy had established schools in almost every parish, and their exertions have enabled the greater number of places to come up to the standard required by the Act, without the assistance of a School Board. The great difficulty is the distance children have to walk to school, from the sparseness of population and

the number of outlying hamlets. This difficulty is felt equally by the farmers, who, in the majority of cases, find themselves situated far from a good school. In only one place has anything like a cry for education arisen, and that is on the extreme northern edge of the country. The Vice-Chairman of the Swindon Chamber of Agriculture recently stated that only one-half of the entire population of Inglesham could read and write. It subsequently appeared that the parish of Inglesham was very sparsely populated, and that a variety of circumstances had prevented vigorous efforts being made. The children, however, could attend schools in adjoining parishes, not farther than two miles, a distance which they frequently walk in other parts of the country.

Those who are so ready to cast every blame upon the farmer, and to represent him as eating up the earnings of his men and enriching himself with their ill-paid labour, should remember that farming, as a rule, is carried on with a large amount of borrowed capital. In these days, when £6 an acre has been expended in growing roots for sheep, when the slightest derangement of calculation in the price of wool, meat, or corn, or the loss of a crop, seriously interferes with a fair return for capital invested, the farmer has to sail extremely close to the wind, and only a little more would find his canvas shaking. It was only recently that the cashier of the principal bank of an agricultural county, after an unprosperous year, declared that such another season would make almost every farmer insolvent. Under these circumstances it is really to be wondered at that they have done as much

as they have for the labourer in the last few years, finding him with better cottages, better wages, better education, and affording him better opportunities of rising in the social scale.

I am, Sir, faithfully yours,
RICHARD JEFFERIES.

Coate Farm, Swindon,
November 12.

THE END.

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